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LECTURES

ON THE

ENGLISH POETS,

AND THE

ENGLISH COMIC WRITERS.

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ENGLISH POETS,

AND THE

ENGLISH COMIC WRITERS.

BY

WILLIAM HAZLITT,

Author of "Table Talk, or Essays on Men and Manners;" "Essays on the Literature of the Age of Elizabeth;" "Characters of Shakspeare's Plays, &c., &c. &c."

A NEW EDITION,

EDITED BY

WILLIAM CAREW HAZLITT.

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NOTICE.

A SUFFICIENTLY full account of these two courses of Lectures, and of the circumstances under which they were originally delivered, upwards of fifty years since, may be found in the *Memoirs of William Hazlitt*, 1867, 2 vols., 8vo. The present republication is a faithful copy of the Author's Editions, which appeared, the *English Poets* in 1818, and the *English Comic Writers* in 1819. Of the former a second impression was printed in 1819.

W. C. H.

Kensington, July, 1869.

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LECTURES

ON THE

ENGLISH POETS.

LECTURE I.—INTRODUCTORY.

ON POETRY IN GENERAL.

THE best general notion which I can give of poetry is, that it is the natural impression of any object or event, by its vividness exciting an involuntary movement of imagination and passion, and producing, by sympathy, a certain modulation of the voice, or sounds, expressing it.

In treating of poetry, I shall speak first of the subject-matter of it, next of the forms of expression to which it gives birth, and afterwards of its connection with harmony of sound.

Poetry is the language of the imagination and the passions. It relates to whatever gives immediate pleasure or pain to the human mind. It comes home to the bosoms and businesses of men; for nothing but what so comes home to them in the most general and intelligible shape can be a subject for poetry. Poetry is the universal language which the heart holds with nature and itself. He who has a contempt for poetry cannot have much respect for himself, or for anything else. It is not a mere frivolous accomplishment (as some persons have been led to imagine), the trifling amusement of a few idle readers or leisure hours:

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it has been the study and delight of mankind in all ages. Many people suppose that poetry is something to be found only in books, contained in lines of ten syllables with like endings: but wherever there is a sense of beauty, or power, or harmony, as in the motion of a wave of the sea, in the growth of a flower that "spreads its sweet leaves to the air, and dedicates its beauty to the sun,"—*there* is poetry, in its birth. If history is a grave study, poetry may be said to be a graver: its materials lie deeper, and are spread wider. History treats, for the most part, of the cumbrous and unwieldy masses of things, the empty cases in which the affairs of the world are packed, under the heads of intrigue or war, in different states, and from century to century: but there is no thought or feeling that can have entered into the mind of man, which he would be eager to communicate to others, or which they would listen to with delight, that is not a fit subject for poetry. It is not a branch of authorship: it is "the stuff of which our life is made." The rest is "mere oblivion," a dead letter: for all that is worth remembering in life is the poetry of it. Fear is poetry, hope is poetry, love is poetry, hatred is poetry; contempt, jealousy, remorse, admiration, wonder, pity, despair, or madness, are all poetry. Poetry is that fine particle within us, that expands, rarefies, refines, raises our whole being: without it "man's life is poor as beast's." Man is a poetical animal: and those of us who do not study the principles of poetry, act upon them all our lives, like Molière's *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, who had always spoken prose without knowing it. The child is a poet, in fact, when he first plays at Hide-and-seek, or repeats the story of Jack the Giant-killer; the shepherd-boy is a poet when he first crowns his mistress with a garland of flowers; the countryman, when he stops to look at the rainbow; the city apprentice, when he gazes after the Lord Mayor's show; the miser, when he hugs his gold; the courtier, who builds his hopes upon a

smile; the savage, who paints his idol with blood; the slave, who worships a tyrant; or the tyrant, who fancies himself a god; the vain, the ambitious, the proud, the choleric man, the hero and the coward, the beggar and the king, the rich and the poor, the young and the old, all live in a world of their own making; and the poet does no more than describe what all the others think and act. If his art is folly and madness, it is folly and madness at second hand. "There is warrant for it." Poets alone have not "such seething brains, such shaping fantasies, that apprehend more than cooler reason" can.

> "The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
> Are of imagination all compact.
> One sees more devils than vast hell can hold,
> That is, the madman: the lover, all as frantic,
> Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.
> The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
> Doth glance from heav'n to earth, from earth to heav'n;
> And, as imagination bodies forth
> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them to shape, and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name.
> Such tricks hath strong imagination."*

If poetry is a dream, the business of life is much the same. If it is a fiction, made up of what we wish things to be, and fancy that they are, because we wish them so, there is no other nor better reality. Ariosto has described the loves of Angelica and Medoro: but was not Medoro, who carved the name of his mistress on the barks of trees, as much enamoured of her charms as he? Homer has celebrated the anger of Achilles: but was not the hero as mad as the poet? Plato banished the poets from his Commonwealth, lest their descriptions of the natural man should spoil his mathematical man, who was to be without passions and affections—who was neither to laugh nor weep, to feel sorrow nor anger, to be cast down nor elated by anything.

* "A Midsummer Night's Dream," v. 1.—Ed.]

This was a chimera, however, which never existed but in the brain of the inventor; and Homer's poetical world has outlived Plato's philosophical Republic.

Poetry then is an imitation of nature, but the imagination and the passions are a part of man's nature. We shape things according to our wishes and fancies, without poetry; but poetry is the most emphatical language that can be found for those creations of the mind "which ecstasy is very cunning in." Neither a mere description of natural objects, nor a mere delineation of natural feelings, however distinct or forcible, constitutes the ultimate end and aim of poetry, without the heightenings of the imagination. The light of poetry is not only a direct but also a reflected light, that while it shows us the object, throws a sparkling radiance on all around it: the flame of the passions, communicated to the imagination, reveals to us, as with a flash of lightning, the inmost recesses of thought, and penetrates our whole being. Poetry represents forms chiefly as they suggest other forms: feelings, as they suggest forms or other feelings. Poetry puts a spirit of life and motion into the universe. It describes the flowing, not the fixed. It does not define the limits of sense, or analyse the distinctions of the understanding, but signifies the excess of the imagination beyond the actual or ordinary impression of any object or feeling. The poetical impression of any object is that uneasy, exquisite sense of beauty or power that cannot be contained within itself, that is impatient of all limit, that (as flame bends to flame) strives to link itself to some other image of kindred beauty or grandeur, to enshrine itself, as it were, in the highest forms of fancy, and to relieve the aching sense of pleasure by expressing it in the boldest manner, and by the most striking examples of the same quality in other instances. Poetry, according to Lord Bacon, for this reason "has something divine in it, because it raises the mind and hurries it into sublimity,

by conforming the shows of things to the desires of the soul, instead of subjecting the soul to external things, as reason and history do." It is strictly the language of the imagination; and the imagination is that faculty which represents objects, not as they are in themselves, but as they are moulded by other thoughts and feelings, into an infinite variety of shapes and combinations of power. This language is not the less true to nature, because it is false in point of fact; but so much the more true and natural, if it conveys the impression which the object under the influence of passion makes on the mind. Let an object, for instance, be presented to the senses in a state of agitation or fear, and the imagination will distort or magnify the object, and convert it into the likeness of whatever is most proper to encourage the fear. "Our eyes are made the fools" of our other faculties. This is the universal law of the imagination:

> "That if it would but apprehend some joy,
> It comprehends some bringer of that joy:
> Or in the night imagining some fear,
> How easy is each bush suppos'd a bear!"

When Iachimo says of Imogen:

> "——The flame o' th' taper
> Bows toward her, and would under-peep her lids
> To see the enclosed lights"—

this passionate interpretation of the motion of the flame, to accord with the speaker's own feelings, is true poetry. The lover, equally with the poet, speaks of the auburn tresses of his mistress as locks of shining gold, because the least tinge of yellow in the hair has, from novelty and a sense of personal beauty, a more lustrous effect to the imagination than the purest gold. We compare a man of gigantic stature to a tower: not that he is anything like so large, but because the excess of his size beyond what we are accustomed to expect, or the usual size of things of

the same class, produces by contrast a greater feeling of magnitude and ponderous strength than another object of ten times the same dimensions. The intensity of the feeling makes up for the disproportion of the objects. Things are equal to the imagination, which have the power of affecting the mind with an equal degree of terror, admiration, delight, or love. When Lear calls upon the heavens to avenge his cause, "for they are old like him," there is nothing extravagant or impious in this sublime identification of his age with theirs; for there is no other image which could do justice to the agonising sense of his wrongs and his despair!

Poetry is the high-wrought enthusiasm of fancy and feeling. As in describing natural objects, it impregnates sensible impressions with the forms of fancy, so it describes the feelings of pleasure or pain, by blending them with the strongest movements of passion, and the most striking forms of nature. Tragic poetry, which is the most impassioned species of it, strives to carry on the feeling to the utmost point of sublimity or pathos, by all the force of comparison or contrast: loses the sense of present suffering in the imaginary exaggeration of it: exhausts the terror or pity by an unlimited indulgence of it: grapples with impossibilities in its desperate impatience of restraint: throws us back upon the past, forward into the future: brings every moment of our being or object of nature in startling review before us: and in the rapid whirl of events, lifts us from the depths of woe to the highest contemplations on human life. When Lear says of Edgar, "Nothing but his unkind daughters could have brought him to this," what a bewildered amazement, what a wrench of the imagination, that cannot be brought to conceive of any other cause of misery than that which has bowed it down, and absorbs all other sorrow in its own! His sorrow, like a flood, supplies the sources of all other sorrow. Again, when

he exclaims in the mad scene, "The little dogs and all, Tray, Blanche, and Sweetheart, see, they bark at me!" it is passion lending occasion to imagination to make every creature in league against him, conjuring up ingratitude and insult in their least looked-for and most galling shapes, searching every thread and fibre of his heart, and finding out the last remaining image of respect or attachment in the bottom of his breast, only to torture and kill it! In like manner, the "So I am" of Cordelia gushes from her heart like a torrent of tears, relieving it of a weight of love and of supposed ingratitude, which had pressed upon it for years. What a fine return of the passion upon itself is that in Othello—with what a mingled agony of regret and despair he clings to the last traces of departed happiness, when he exclaims:

——"O now, for ever,
Farewell the tranquil mind! farewell content!
Farewell the plumèd troop, and the big wars,
That make ambition virtue! O, farewell!
Farewell the neighing steed, and the shrill trump,
The spirit-stirring drum, the ear-piercing fife,
The royal banner; and all quality,
Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war!
And O you mortal engines, whose rude throats
Th' immortal Jove's dread clamours counterfeit,
Farewell! Othello's occupation's gone!"*

How his passion lashes itself up and swells and rages like a tide in its sounding course, when, in answer to the doubts expressed of his returning love, he says:

"Never, Iago. Like to the Pontic sea,
Whose icy current and compulsive course
Ne'er feels retiring ebb, but keeps due on
To the Propontic and the Hellespont:
Even so my bloody thoughts, with violent pace,
Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to humble love,
Till that a capable and wide revenge
Swallow them up."†

* "Othello," iii. 3. † *Ibid.*

The climax of his expostulation afterwards with Desdemona is at that passage:*

> "But there where I have garner'd up my heart . . . .
> To be discarded thence!"

One mode in which the dramatic exhibition of passion excites our sympathy without raising our disgust is, that in proportion as it sharpens the edge of calamity and disappointment, it strengthens the desire of good. It enhances our consciousness of the blessing, by making us sensible of the magnitude of the loss. The storm of passion lays bare and shows us the rich depths of the human soul: the whole of our existence, the sum total of our passions and pursuits, of that which we desire and that which we dread, is brought before us by contrast; the action and re-action are equal; the keenness of immediate suffering only gives us a more intense aspiration after, and a more intimate participation with the antagonist world of good: makes us drink deeper of the cup of human life: tugs at the heart-strings: loosens the pressure about them, and calls the springs of thought and feeling into play with tenfold force.

Impassioned poetry is an emanation of the moral and intellectual part of our nature, as well as of the sensitive—of the desire to know, the will to act, and the power to feel; and ought to appeal to these different parts of our constitution, in order to be perfect. The domestic or prose tragedy, which is thought to be the most natural, is in this sense the least so, because it appeals almost exclusively to one of these faculties, our sensibility. The tragedies of Moore and Lillo, for this reason, however affecting at the time, oppress and lie like a dead weight upon the mind, a load of misery which it is unable to throw off; the tragedy of Shakspeare, which is true poetry, stirs our inmost affections; abstracts evil from

* By a slip of the pen the author wrote *line*. See "Othello," iv. 1. (Dyce's edit. 1868, vii. 446.)—Ed.

itself by combining it with all the forms of imagination, and with the deepest workings of the heart; and rouses the whole man within us.

The pleasure, however, derived from tragic poetry is not anything peculiar to it as poetry, as a fictitious and fanciful thing. It is not an anomaly of the imagination. It has its source and ground-work in the common love of strong excitement. As Mr. Burke observes, people flock to see a tragedy; but if there were a public execution in the next street, the theatre would very soon be empty. It is not then the difference between fiction and reality that solves the difficulty. Children are satisfied with the stories of ghosts and witches in plain prose: nor do the hawkers of full, true, and particular accounts of murders and executions about the streets find it necessary to have them turned into penny ballads, before they can dispose of these interesting and authentic documents. The grave politician drives a thriving trade of abuse and calumnies poured out against those whom he makes his enemies for no other end than that he may live by them. The popular preacher makes less frequent mention of Heaven than of hell. Oaths and nicknames are only a more vulgar sort of poetry or rhetoric. We are as fond of indulging our violent passions as of reading a description of those of others. We are as prone to make a torment of our fears, as to luxuriate in our hopes of good. If it be asked, Why we do so? the best answer will be, Because we cannot help it. The sense of power is as strong a principle in the mind as the love of pleasure. Objects of terror and pity exercise the same despotic control over it as those of love or beauty. It is as natural to hate as to love, to despise as to admire, to express our hatred or contempt, as our love or admiration:

> "Masterless passion sways us to the mood
> Of what it likes or loathes."

Not that we like what we loathe; but we like to in-

dulge our hatred and scorn of it, to dwell upon it, to exasperate our idea of it by every refinement of ingenuity and extravagance of illustration, to make it a bugbear to ourselves, to point it out to others in all the splendour of deformity, to embody it to the senses, to stigmatise it by name, to grapple with it in thought—in action, to sharpen our intellect, to arm our will against it, to know the worst we have to contend with, and to contend with it to the utmost. Poetry is only the highest eloquence of passion, the most vivid form of expression that can be given to our conception of anything, whether pleasurable or painful, mean or dignified, delightful or distressing. It is the perfect coincidence of the image and the words with the feeling we have, and of which we cannot get rid in any other way, that gives an instant "satisfaction to the thought." This is equally the origin of wit and fancy, of comedy and tragedy, of the sublime and pathetic. When Pope says of the Lord Mayor's show—

> "Now night descending, the proud scene is o'er,
> But lives in Settle's numbers one day more!"

when Collins makes Danger, "with limbs of giant mould,"

> —— "Throw him on the steep
> Of some loose hanging rock asleep":

when Lear calls out in extreme anguish—

> "Ingratitude, thou marble-hearted fiend,
> More hideous, when thou shew'st thee in a child
> Than the sea-monster!" *

the passion of contempt in the one case, of terror in the other, and of indignation in the last, is perfectly satisfied. We see the thing ourselves, and show it to others as we feel it to exist, and as, in spite of ourselves, we are compelled to think of it. The imagination, by thus embodying and turning them to shape, gives an obvious relief to the in-

* "Lear," iv. 1. (Dyce's ed. 1868, vii. 270.)—Ed.

distinct and importunate cravings of the will. We do not wish the thing to be so; but we wish it to appear such as it is. For knowledge is conscious power; and the mind is no longer in this case the dupe, though it may be the victim, of vice or folly.

Poetry is in all its shapes the language of the imagination and the passions, of fancy and will. Nothing, therefore, can be more absurd than the outcry which has been sometimes raised by frigid and pedantic critics for reducing the language of poetry to the standard of common sense and reason: for the end and use of poetry, "both at the first and now, was and is to hold the mirror up to nature," seen through the medium of passion and imagination, not divested of that medium by means of literal truth or abstract reason. The painter of history might as well be required to represent the face of a person who has just trod upon a serpent with the still-life expression of a common portrait, as the poet to describe the most striking and vivid impressions which things can be supposed to make upon the mind, in the language of common conversation. Let who will strip nature of the colours and the shapes of fancy, the poet is not bound to do so; the impressions of common sense and strong imagination, that is, of passion and indifference, cannot be the same, and they must have a separate language to do justice to either. Objects must strike differently upon the mind, independently of what they are in themselves, as long as we have a different interest in them, as we see them in a different point of view, nearer or at a greater distance (morally or physically speaking) from novelty, from old acquaintance, from our ignorance of them, from our fear of their consequences, from contrast, from unexpected likeness. We can no more take away the faculty of the imagination, than we can see all objects without light or shade. Some things must dazzle us by their preternatural light; others must hold us in suspense, and tempt our

curiosity to explore their obscurity. Those who would dispel these various illusions, to give us their drab-coloured creation in their stead, are not very wise. Let the naturalist, if he will, catch the glow-worm, carry it home with him in a box, and find it next morning nothing but a little grey worm: let the poet or the lover of poetry visit it at evening, when beneath the scented hawthorn and the crescent moon it has built itself a palace of emerald light. This is also one part of nature, one appearance which the glow-worm presents, and that not the least interesting; so poetry is one part of the history of the human mind, though it is neither science nor philosophy. It cannot be concealed, however, that the progress of knowledge and refinement has a tendency to circumscribe the limits of the imagination, and to clip the wings of poetry. The province of the imagination is principally visionary, the unknown and undefined: the understanding restores things to their natural boundaries, and strips them of their fanciful pretensions. Hence the history of religious and poetical enthusiasm is much the same; and both have received a sensible shock from the progress of experimental philosophy. It is the undefined and uncommon that gives birth and scope to the imagination; we can only fancy what we do not know. As in looking into the mazes of a tangled wood we fill them with what shapes we please—with ravenous beasts, with caverns vast, and drear enchantments—so in our ignorance of the world about us, we make gods or devils of the first object we see, and set no bounds to the wilful suggestions of our hopes and fears:

> "And visions, as poetic eyes avow,
> Hang on each leaf and cling to every bough."

There can never be another Jacob's Dream. Since that time, the heavens have gone farther off, and grown astronomical. They have become averse to the imagination: nor will they return to us on the squares of the distances, or

on Doctor Chalmers's Discourses. Rembrandt's picture brings the matter nearer to us. It is not only the progress of mechanical knowledge, but the necessary advances of civilisation, that are unfavourable to the spirit of poetry. We not only stand in less awe of the preternatural world, but we can calculate more surely, and look with more indifference, upon the regular routine of this. The heroes of the fabulous ages rid the world of monsters and giants. At present we are less exposed to the vicissitudes of good or evil, to the incursions of wild beasts or "bandit fierce," or to the unmitigated fury of the elements. The time has been that "our fell of hair would at a dismal treatise rouse, and stir as life were in it." But the police spoils all; and we now hardly so much as dream of a midnight murder. Macbeth is only tolerated in this country for the sake of the music; and in the United States of America, where the philosophical principles of government are carried still further in theory and practice, we find that the Beggar's Opera is hooted from the stage. Society, by degrees, is constructed into a machine that carries us safely and insipidly from one end of life to the other, in a very comfortable prose style:

> "Obscurity her curtain round them drew,
> And siren Sloth a dull quietus sung."

The remarks which have been here made, would, in some measure, lead to a solution of the question of the comparative merits of painting and poetry. I do not mean to give any preference, but it should seem that the argument which has been sometimes set up, that painting must affect the imagination more strongly, because it represents the image more distinctly, is not well founded. We may assume without much temerity that poetry is more poetical than painting. When artists or connoisseurs talk on stilts about the poetry of painting, they show that they know little about poetry, and have little love for the art.

Painting gives the object itself; poetry what it implies. Painting embodies what a thing contains in itself; poetry suggests what exists out of it, in any manner connected with it. But this last is the proper province of the imagination. Again, as it relates to passion, painting gives the event, poetry the progress of events; but it is during the progress, in the interval of expectation and suspense, while our hopes and fears are strained to the highest pitch of breathless agony, that the pinch of the interest lies:

> "Between the acting of a dreadful thing
> And the first motion, all the interim is
> Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream.
> The mortal instruments are then in council;
> And the state of man, like to a little kingdom,
> Suffers then the nature of an insurrection."

But by the time that the picture is painted, all is over. Faces are the best part of a picture; but even faces are not what we chiefly remember in what interests us most. But it may be asked then, Is there anything better than Claude Lorraine's landscapes, than Titian's portraits, than Raphael's cartoons, or the Greek statues? Of the two first I shall say nothing, as they are evidently picturesque rather than imaginative. Raphael's cartoons are certainly the finest comments that ever were made on the Scriptures. Would their effect be the same if we were not acquainted with the text? But the New Testament existed before the cartoons. There is one subject of which there is no cartoon: Christ washing the feet of the disciples the night before His death. But that chapter does not need a commentary. It is for want of some such resting-place for the imagination that the Greek statues are little else than specious forms. They are marble to the touch and to the heart. They have not an informing principle within them. In their faultless excellence they appear sufficient to themselves. By their beauty they are raised above the frailties of passion or suffering. By their beauty they are deified.

But they are not objects of religious faith to us, and their forms are a reproach to common humanity. They seem to have no sympathy with us, and not to want our admiration.

Poetry in its matter and form is natural imagery or feeling, combined with passion and fancy. In its mode of conveyance, it combines the ordinary use of language with musical expression. There is a question of long standing in what the essence of poetry consists, or what it is that determines why one set of ideas should be expressed in prose, another in verse. Milton has told us his idea of poetry in a single line:

> "Thoughts that voluntary move
> Harmonious numbers."

As there are certain sounds that excite certain movements, and the song and dance go together, so there are, no doubt, certain thoughts that lead to certain tones of voice, or modulations of sound, and change "the words of Mercury into the songs of Apollo." There is a striking instance of this adaptation of the movement of sound and rhythm to the subject, in Spenser's description of the Satyrs accompanying Una to the cave of Sylvanus:

> "So from the ground she fearless doth arise,
> And walketh forth without suspect of crime.
> They, all as glad as birds of joyous prime,
> Thence lead her forth, about her dancing round,
> Shouting and singing all a shepherd's rhyme;
> And with green branches strewing all the ground,
> Do worship her as queen with olive garland crown'd.
>
> And all the way their merry pipes they sound,
> That all the woods and doubled echoes ring;
> And with their horned feet do wear the ground,
> Leaping like wanton kids in pleasant spring;
> So towards old Sylvanus they her bring,
> Who with the noise awaked, cometh out."*

On the contrary, there is nothing either musical or natural

* *Faëry Queen*, b. i. c. vi.

in the ordinary construction of language. It is a thing altogether arbitrary and conventional. Neither in the sounds themselves, which are the voluntary signs of certain ideas, nor in their grammatical arrangements in common speech, is there any principle of natural imitation, or correspondence to the individual ideas or to the tone of feeling with which they are conveyed to others. The jerks, the breaks, the inequalities and harshnesses of prose are fatal to the flow of a poetical imagination, as a jolting road or a stumbling horse disturbs the reverie of an absent man. But poetry makes these odds all even. It is the music of language, answering to the music of the mind, untying, as it were, "the secret soul of harmony." Wherever any object takes such a hold of the mind as to make us dwell upon it, and brood over it, melting the heart in tenderness, or kindling it to a sentiment of enthusiasm; wherever a movement of imagination or passion is impressed on the mind, by which it seeks to prolong and repeat the emotion, to bring all other objects into accord with it, and to give the same movement of harmony, sustained and continuous, or gradually varied, according to the occasion, to the sounds that express it—this is poetry. The musical in sound is the sustained and continuous; the musical in thought is the sustained and continuous also. There is a near connection between music and deep-rooted passion. Mad people sing. As often as articulation passes naturally into intonation, there poetry begins. Where one idea gives a tone and colour to others, where one feeling melts others into it, there can be no reason why the same principle should not be extended to the sounds by which the voice utters these emotions of the soul, and blends syllables and lines into each other. It is to supply the inherent defect of harmony in the customary mechanism of language, to make the sound an echo to the sense, when the sense becomes a sort of echo to itself—to mingle the tide of verse, "the golden cadences of poetry," with the tide of

feeling, flowing and murmuring as it flows—in short, to take the language of the imagination from off the ground, and enable it to spread its wings where it may indulge its own impulses:

> "Sailing with supreme dominion
> Through the azure deep of air"—

without being stopped, or fretted, or diverted with the abruptnesses and petty obstacles, and discordant flats and sharps of prose, that poetry was invented. It is to common language what springs are to a carriage, or wings to feet. In ordinary speech we arrive at a certain harmony by the modulations of the voice: in poetry the same thing is done systematically by a regular collocation of syllables. It has been well observed, that every one who declaims warmly, or grows intent upon a subject, rises into a sort of blank verse or measured prose. The merchant, as described in Chaucer, went on his way "sounding always the increase of his winning." Every prose-writer has more or less of rhythmical adaptation, except poets who, when deprived of the regular mechanism of verse, seem to have no principle of modulation left in their writings.*

An excuse might be made for rhyme in the same manner. It is but fair that the ear should linger on the sounds that delight it, or avail itself of the same brilliant coincidence and unexpected recurrence of syllables, that have been displayed in the invention and collocation of images. It is allowed that rhyme assists the memory; and a man of wit and shrewdness has been heard to say, that the only four good lines of poetry are the well-known ones which tell the number of days in the months of the year:

> "Thirty days hath September," &c.

But if the jingle of names assists the memory, may it not

* This part of the subject is treated at large in the writer's essay "On the Prose Style of Poets (*Plain Speaker*, i. 1–30)."—Ed.

also quicken the fancy? and there are other things worth having at our fingers' ends, besides the contents of the almanac. Pope's versification is tiresome from its excessive sweetness and uniformity. Shakspeare's blank verse is the perfection of dramatic dialogue.

All is not poetry that passes for such: nor does verse make the whole difference between poetry and prose. The Iliad does not cease to be poetry in a literal translation; and Addison's Campaign has been very properly denominated a Gazette in rhyme. Common prose differs from poetry, as treating for the most part either of such trite, familiar, and irksome matters of fact, as convey no extraordinary impulse to the imagination, or else of such difficult and laborious processes of the understanding, as do not admit of the wayward or violent movements either of the imagination or the passions.

I will mention three works which come as near to poetry as possible without absolutely being so; namely, the Pilgrim's Progress, Robinson Crusoe, and the Tales of Boccaccio. Chaucer and Dryden have translated some of the last into English rhyme, but the essence and the power of poetry was there before. That which lifts the spirit above the earth, which draws the soul out of itself with indescribable longings, is poetry in kind, and generally fit to become so in name, by being "married to immortal verse." If it is of the essence of poetry to strike and fix the imagination, whether we will or no, to make the eye of childhood glisten with the starting tear, to be never thought of afterwards with indifference, John Bunyan and Daniel Defoe may be permitted to pass for poets in their way. The mixture of fancy and reality in the Pilgrim's Progress was never equalled in any allegory. His pilgrims walk above the earth, and yet are on it. What zeal, what beauty, what truth of fiction! What deep feeling in the description of Christian's swimming across the water at last, and in the picture of the Shining

Ones within the gates, with wings at their backs and garlands on their heads, who are to wipe all tears from his eyes! The writer's genius, though not "dipped in dews of Castalie," was baptised with the Holy Spirit and with fire. The prints in this book are no small part of it. If the confinement of Philoctetes in the island of Lemnos was a subject for the most beautiful of all the Greek tragedies,* what shall we say to Robinson Crusoe in his? Take the speech of the Greek hero on leaving his cave, beautiful as it is, and compare it with the reflections of the English adventurer in his solitary place of confinement. The thoughts of home, and of all from which he is for ever cut off, swell and press against his bosom, as the heaving ocean rolls its ceaseless tide against the rocky shore, and the very beatings of his heart become audible in the eternal silence that surrounds him. Thus he says:

"As I walked about, either in my hunting, or for viewing the country, the anguish of my soul at my condition would break out upon me on a sudden, and my very heart would die within me to think of the woods, the mountains, and deserts I was in; and how I was a prisoner, locked up with the eternal bars and bolts of the ocean, in an uninhabited wilderness, without redemption. In the midst of the greatest composures of my mind, this would break out upon me like a storm, and make me wring my hands, and weep like a child. Sometimes it would take me in the middle of my work, and I would immediately sit down and sigh, and look upon the ground for an hour or two together, and this was still worse to me, for if I could burst into tears or vent myself in words, it would go off, and the grief having exhausted itself would abate."

The story of his adventures would not make a poem like the Odyssey, it is true; but the relator had the true genius of a poet. It has been made a question whether Richardson's romances are poetry; and the answer perhaps is, that they are not poetry, because they are not romance. The interest is worked up to an inconceivable height; but it is by an infinite number of little things.

* The "Hercules Furens" of Euripides. But as to the *pre-eminent* beauty and merit of this tragedy critics are at variance.—Ed.

by incessant labour and calls upon the attention, by a repetition of blows that have no rebound in them. The sympathy excited is not a voluntary contribution, but a tax. Nothing is unforced and spontaneous. There is a want of elasticity and motion. The story does not "give an echo to the seat where love is throned." The heart does not answer of itself like a chord in music. The fancy does not run on before the writer with breathless expectation, but is dragged along with an infinite number of pins and wheels, like those with which the Liliputians dragged Gulliver pinioned to the royal palace. Sir Charles Grandison is a coxcomb. What sort of a figure would he cut, translated into an epic poem, by the side of Achilles? Clarissa, the divine Clarissa, is too interesting by half. She is interesting in her ruffles, in her gloves, her samplers, her aunts and uncles—she is interesting in all that is uninteresting. Such things, however intensely they may be brought home to us, are not conductors to the imagination. There is infinite truth and feeling in Richardson; but it is extracted from a *caput mortuum* of circumstances: it does not evaporate of itself. His poetical genius is like Ariel confined in a pine tree, and requires an artificial process to let it out. Shakspeare says:

> "Our poesy is as a gum, which oozes
> From whence 'tis nourished . . . our gentle flame
> Provokes itself, and, like the current, flies
> Each bound it chafes."*

I shall conclude this general account with some remarks on four of the principal works of poetry in the world, at

* "Timon of Athens," i. 1 (Dyce's ed. 1868).—Ed. Burke's writings are not poetry, notwithstanding the vividness of the fancy, because the subject-matter is abstruse and dry: not natural, but artificial. The difference between poetry and eloquence is, that the one is the eloquence of the imagination, and the other of the understanding. Eloquence tries to persuade the will, and convince the reason; poetry produces its effect by instantaneous sympathy. Nothing is a subject for poetry that admits of a dispute.

different periods of history—Homer, the Bible, Dante, and, let me add, Ossian.* In Homer, the principle of action or life is predominant: in the Bible, the principle of faith and the idea of Providence; Dante is a personification of blind will; and in Ossian we see the decay of life and the lag end of the world. Homer's poetry is the heroic: it is full of life and action: it is bright as the day, strong as a river. In the vigour of his intellect, he grapples with all the objects of nature, and enters into all the relations of social life. He saw many countries, and the manners of many men; and he has brought them all together in his poem. He describes his heroes going to battle with a prodigality of life, arising from an exuberance of animal spirits: we see them before us, their number and their order of battle, poured out upon the plain "all plumed like ostriches, like eagles newly bathed, wanton as goats, wild as young bulls, youthful as May, and gorgeous as the sun at midsummer," covered with glittering armour, with dust and blood; while the gods quaff their nectar in golden cups, or mingle in the fray; and the old men assembled on the walls of Troy rise up with reverence as Helen passes by them. The multitude of things in Homer is wonderful; their splendour, their truth, their force and variety. His poetry is, like his religion, the poetry of number and form: he describes the bodies as well as the souls of men.

The poetry of the Bible is that of imagination and of faith: it is abstract and disembodied: it is not the poetry

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Poets are in general bad prose-writers, because their images, though fine in themselves, are not to the purpose, and do not carry on the argument. The French poetry wants the forms of the imagination. It is didactic more than dramatic; and some of our own poetry which has been most admired, is only poetry in the rhyme, and in the studied use of poetic diction.

* The author was not aware that the so-called *Poems of Ossian* were fabricated by Macpherson himself.—Ed.

of form, but of power; not of multitude, but of immensity. It does not divide into many, but aggrandises into one. Its ideas of nature are like its ideas of God. It is not the poetry of social life, but of solitude: each man seems alone in the world, with the original forms of nature, the rocks, the earth, and the sky. It is not the poetry of action or heroic enterprise, but of faith in a supreme Providence, and resignation to the power that governs the universe. As the idea of God was removed farther from humanity and a scattered polytheism, it became more profound and intense, as it became more universal, for the Infinite is present to everything: "If we fly into the uttermost parts of the earth, it is there also; if we turn to the east or the west, we cannot escape from it." Man is thus aggrandised in the image of his Maker. The history of the patriarchs is of this kind; they are founders of a chosen race of people, the inheritors of the earth; they exist in the generations which are to come after them. Their poetry, like their religious creed, is vast, unformed, obscure and infinite; a vision is upon it; an invisible hand is suspended over it. The spirit of the Christian religion consists in the glory hereafter to be revealed; but in the Hebrew dispensation Providence took an immediate share in the affairs of this life. Jacob's dream arose out of this intimate communion between heaven and earth: it was this that let down, in the sight of the youthful patriarch, a golden ladder from the sky to the earth, with angels ascending and descending upon it, and shed a light upon the lonely place, which can never pass away. The story of Ruth, again, is as if all the depth of natural affection in the human race was involved in her breast. There are descriptions in the book of Job more prodigal of imagery, more intense in passion, than any thing in Homer; as that of the state of his prosperity, and of the vision that came upon him by night. The metaphors in the Old Testament are more boldly figurative. Things were collected more

into masses, and gave a greater *momentum* to the imagination.

Dante was the father of modern poetry, and he may therefore claim a place in this connection. His poem is the first great step from Gothic darkness and barbarism; and the struggle of thought in it to burst the thraldom in which the human mind had been so long held, is felt in every page. He stood bewildered, not appalled, on that dark shore which separates the ancient and the modern world; and saw the glories of antiquity dawning through the abyss of time, while revelation opened its passage to the other world. He was lost in wonder at what had been done before him, and he dared to emulate it. Dante seems to have been indebted to the Bible for the gloomy tone of his mind, as well as for the prophetic fury which exalts and kindles his poetry; but he is utterly unlike Homer. His genius is not a sparkling flame, but the sullen heat of a furnace. He is power, passion, self-will personified. In all that relates to the descriptive or fanciful part of poetry, he bears no comparison to many who had gone before, or who have come after him; but there is a gloomy abstraction in his conceptions, which lies like a dead weight upon the mind—a benumbing stupor, a breathless awe, from the intensity of the impression—a terrible obscurity, like that which oppresses us in dreams—an identity of interest, which moulds every object to its own purposes, and clothes all things with the passions and imaginations of the human soul—that make amends for all other deficiencies. The immediate objects he presents to the mind are not much in themselves; they want grandeur, beauty, and order; but they become everything by the force of the character he impresses upon them. His mind lends its own power to the objects which it contemplates, instead of borrowing it from them. He takes advantage even of the nakedness and dreary vacuity of his subject. His imagination peoples the shades of death, and broods over the silent air. He is

the severest of all writers, the most hard and impenetrable, the most opposite to the flowery and glittering; [the writer] who relies most on his own power, and the sense of it in others, and who leaves most room to the imagination of his readers. Dante's only endeavour is to interest; and he interests by exciting our sympathy with the emotion by which he is himself possessed. He does not place before us the objects by which that emotion has been created; but he seizes on the attention, by showing us the effect they produce on his feelings; and his poetry accordingly gives the same thrilling and overwhelming sensation which is caught by gazing on the face of a person who has seen some object of horror. The improbability of the events, the abruptness and monotony in the "Inferno," are excessive: but the interest never flags, from the continued earnestness of the author's mind. Dante's great power is in combining internal feelings with external objects. Thus the gate of hell, on which that withering inscription is written, seems to be endowed with speech and consciousness, and to utter its dread warning, not without a sense of mortal woes. This author habitually unites the absolutely local and individual with the greatest wildness and mysticism. In the midst of the obscure and shadowy regions of the lower world, a tomb suddenly rises up with the inscription, "I am the tomb of Pope Anastasius the Sixth:" and half the personages whom he has crowded into the "Inferno" are his own acquaintance. All this, perhaps, tends to heighten the effect by the bold intermixture of realities, and by an appeal, as it were, to the individual knowledge and experience of the reader. He affords few subjects for picture. There is, indeed, one gigantic one, that of Count Ugolino, of which Michael Angelo made a bas-relief, and which Sir Joshua Reynolds ought not to have painted.

Another writer whom I shall mention last, and whom I cannot persuade myself to think a mere modern in the

groundwork, is Ossian.* He is a feeling and a name that can never be destroyed in the minds of his readers. As Homer is the first vigour and lustihead, Ossian is the decay and old age of poetry. He lives only in the recollection and regret of the past. There is one impression which he conveys more entirely than all other poets; namely, the sense of privation, the loss of all things, of friends, of good name, of country; he is even without God in the world. He converses only with the spirits of the departed; with the motionless and silent clouds. The cold moonlight sheds its faint lustre on his head; the fox peeps out of the ruined tower; the thistle waves its beard to the wandering gale; and the strings of his harp seem, as the hand of age, as the tale of other times, passes over them, to sigh and rustle like the dry reeds in the winter's wind! The feeling of cheerless desolation, of the loss of the pith and sap of existence, of the annihilation of the substance, and the clinging to the shadow of all things, as in a mock-embrace, is here perfect. In this way, the lamentation of Selma for the loss of Salgar is the finest of all. If it were indeed possible to show that this writer was nothing, it would only be another instance of mutability, another blank made, another void left in the heart, another confirmation of that feeling which makes him so often complain, "Roll on, ye dark brown years, ye bring no joy on your wing to Ossian!"

* It is probable that Macpherson collected certain oral traditions in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, and elaborated them into what we see. He was a sort of Bishop Percy on a bolder scale, without the bishop's honesty and candour.—Ed.

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LECTURE II.

ON CHAUCER AND SPENSER.

Having, in the former Lecture, given some account of the nature of poetry in general, I shall proceed, in the next place, to a more particular consideration of the genius and history of English poetry. I shall take, as the subject of the present lecture, Chaucer and Spenser, two out of four of the greatest names in poetry of which this country has to boast. Both of them, however, were much indebted to the early poets of Italy, and may be considered as belonging, in a certain degree, to the same school. The freedom and copiousness with which our most original writers, in former periods, availed themselves of the productions of their predecessors, frequently transcribing whole passages, without scruple or acknowledgment, may appear contrary to the etiquette of modern literature, when the whole stock of poetical common-places has become public property, and no one is compelled to trade upon any particular author. But it is not so much a subject of wonder at a time, when to read and write was of itself an honorary distinction, when learning was almost as great a rarity as genius, and when, in fact, those who first transplanted the beauties of other languages into their own, might be considered as public benefactors and the founders of a national literature. There are poets older than Chaucer, and in the interval between him and Spenser; but their genius was not such as to place them in any point of comparison with either of these celebrated men; and an inquiry into their particular merits or defects might seem rather

to belong to the province of the antiquary, than be thought generally interesting to the lovers of poetry in the present day.

Chaucer (who has been very properly considered as the father of English poetry) preceded Spenser by two centuries. He is supposed to have been born in London, in the year 1328, during the reign of Edward III., and to have died in 1400, at the age of seventy-two. He received a learned education at one, or at both of the universities,* and travelled early into Italy, where he became thoroughly imbued with the spirit and excellences of the great Italian poets and prose-writers, Dante, Petrarch, and Boccacio; and is said to have had a personal interview with one of these, Petrarch. He was connected by marriage with the famous John of Gaunt,† through whose interest he was introduced into several public employments. Chaucer was an active partisan, a religious reformer, and from the share he took in some disturbances on one occasion, he was obliged to fly the country. On his return, he was imprisoned, and made his peace with government, as it is said, by a discovery of his associates. Fortitude does not appear at any time to have been the distinguishing virtue of poets. There is, however, an obvious similarity between the practical turn of Chaucer's mind and restless impatience of his character, and the tone of his writings. Yet it would be too much to attribute the one to the other as cause and effect: for Spenser, whose poetical temperament was as effeminate as Chaucer's was stern and masculine, was equally engaged in public affairs, and had mixed equally in the great world. So much does native disposition predominate over accidental circumstances, moulding them to its previous bent and purposes! For while Chaucer's intercourse with the busy world, and col-

* This is excessively doubtful. See Bell's *Chaucer*, i. 10–13.—Ed.

† He merely married the sister of one of John of Gaunt's first Duchess's maids of honour.—Ed.

lision with the actual passions and conflicting interests of others, seemed to brace the sinews of his understanding, and gave to his writings the air of a man who describes persons and things that he had known and been intimately concerned in; the same opportunities, operating on a differently-constituted frame, only served to alienate Spenser's mind the more from the "close-pent-up" scenes of ordinary life, and to make him "rive their concealing continents," to give himself up to the unrestrained indulgence of "flowery tenderness."

It is not possible for any two writers to be more opposite in this respect. Spenser delighted in luxurious enjoyment; Chaucer, in severe activity of mind. As Spenser was the most romantic and visionary, Chaucer was the most practical of all the great poets, the most a man of business and the world. His poetry reads like history. Everything has a downright reality, at least in the relator's mind. A simile or a sentiment is as if it were given in upon evidence. Thus he describes Cressid's first avowal of her love:

> "And as the new abashed nightingale,
> That stinteth first when she beginneth sing,
> When that she heareth any herde's tale,
> Or in the hedges any wight stirring,
> And after, sicker, doth her voice outring;
> Right so Cresseide, when that her dread stent,
> Open'd her heart, and told him her intent."

This is so true and natural, and beautifully simple, that the two things seem identified with each other. Again, it is said in the Knight's Tale:

> "Thus passeth yere by yere, and day by day,
> Till it felle ones in a morwe of May,
> That Emelie that fayrer was to sene
> Than is the lilie upon his stalke grene;
> And fresher than the May with floures newe,
> For with the rose-colour strof hire hewe:
> I n'ot * which was the finer of hem two."

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* *I. e.* ne not, do not know.—Ed.

This scrupulousness about the literal preference, as if some question of matter of fact was at issue, is remarkable. I might mention that other, where he compares the meeting between Palamon and Arcite to a hunter waiting for a lion in a gap:

> "That stondeth at a gap with a spere,
> Whan hunted is the lion or the bere,
> And hereth him come rushing in the greves,
> And breking bothe the boughes and the leves":

or that still finer one of Constance, when she is condemned to death:

> "Have ye not seen sometime a pale face
> (Among a prees) of him that hath been lad
> Toward his deth, wheras he geteth no grace,
> And swiche a colour in his face hath had,
> Men mighten know him that was so bestad,
> Amonges all the faces in that route;
> So stant Custance, and loketh hire aboute."

The beauty, the pathos here does not seem to be of the poet's seeking, but a part of the necessary texture of the fable. He speaks of what he wishes to describe with the accuracy, the discrimination of one who relates what has happened to himself, or has had the best information from those who have been eye-witnesses of it. The strokes of his pencil always tell. He dwells only on the essential, on that which would be interesting to the persons really concerned: yet as he never omits any material circumstance, he is prolix from the number of points on which he touches, without being diffuse on any one; and is sometimes tedious from the fidelity with which he adheres to his subject, as other writers are from the frequency of their digressions from it. The chain of his story is composed of a number of fine links, closely connected together, and riveted by a single blow. There is an instance of the minuteness which he introduces into his most serious descriptions in his account of Palamon when left alone in his cell:

> "Swiche sorrow he maketh that the grete tour
> Resouned of his yelling * and clamour:
> The pure fetters on his shinnes grete
> Were of his bitter salte teres wete."

The mention of this last circumstance looks like a part of the instructions he had to follow, which he had no discretionary power to leave out or introduce at pleasure. He is contented to find grace and beauty in truth. He exhibits for the most part the naked object, with little drapery thrown over it. His metaphors, which are few, are not for ornament, but use, and as like as possible to the things themselves. He does not affect to show his power over the reader's mind, but the power which his subject has over his own. The readers of Chaucer's poetry feel more nearly what the persons he describes must have felt, than perhaps those of any other poet. His sentiments are not voluntary effusions of the poet's fancy, but [are] founded on the natural impulses and habitual prejudices of the characters he has to represent. There is an inveteracy of purpose, a sincerity of feeling, which never relaxes or grows vapid, in whatever they do or say. There is no artificial, pompous display, but a strict parsimony of the poet's materials, like the rude simplicity of the age in which he lived. His poetry resembles the root just springing from the ground, rather than the full-blown flower. His muse is no "babbling gossip of the air," fluent and redundant: but, like a stammerer or a dumb person, that has just found the use of speech, crowds many things together with eager haste, with anxious pauses, and fond repetitions to prevent mistake. His words point as an index to the objects, like the eye or finger. There were none of the common-places of poetic diction in our author's time, no reflected lights of fancy, no borrowed roseate tints; he was obliged to inspect things

* This term is used by Chaucer merely in the sense of vehement crying. Browne employs it in the same sense in his "Britannica's Pastorals."—Ed.

for himself, to look narrowly, and almost to handle the object, as in the obscurity of morning we partly see and partly grope our way; so that his descriptions have a sort of tangible character belonging to them, and produce the effect of sculpture on the mind. Chaucer had an equal eye for truth of nature and discrimination of character; and his interest in what he saw gave new distinctness and force to his power of observation. The picturesque and the dramatic are in him closely blended together, and hardly distinguishable; for he principally describes external appearances as indicating character, as symbols of internal sentiment. There is a meaning in what he sees; and it is this which catches his eye by sympathy. Thus the costume and dress of the Canterbury Pilgrims, of the Knight, the Squire, the Oxford Scholar, the Gap-toothed Wife of Bath, and the rest, speak for themselves. To take one or two of these at random:

> "There was also a nonne, a Prioresse,
> That of hire smiling was ful simple and coy;
> Hire gretest othe n'as but by seint Eloy:
> And she was cleped Madame Englentine.
> Ful wel she sange the service divine
> Entuned in hire nose ful semyly;
> And Frenche she spake ful fayre and fetisly,
> After the scole of Stratford atte Bowe,
> For Frenche of Paris was to hire unknowe.
> At mete wel ytaughte was she withalle;
> She lette no morsel from hire lippes falle,
> Ne wette hire fingres in hire sauce depe.*
> * * * * * *
> And sikerly she was of great disport,
> And ful plesant, and amiable of port,
> And peined hire to contrefeten chere
> Of court, and ben estatlich of manere,
> And to ben holden digne of reverence.
> But for to speken of hire conscience,

* Chaucer found these and others laid down in the manuals of good behaviour, current in his time, as rules of conduct at table. See Mr. Furnival's *Babees Boke*, 1868.—Ed.

She was so charitable and so pitous,
She wolde wepe if that she saw a mous
Caughte in a trappe, if it were ded or bledde.
Of smale houndes hadde she, that she fedde
With rosted flesh, and milk, and wastel brede.
But sore wept she if on of hem were dede,
Or if men smote it with a yerde smert:
And all was conscience and tendre herte.

Ful semely hire wimple ypinched was;
Hire nose streight; hire eyen grey as glas;
Hire mouth ful smale; and therto soft and red;
But sickerly she hadde a fayre forehed.
It was almost a spanne brode, I trowe."

"A Monk there was, a fayre for the maistrie,
An out-rider, that loved venerie:
A manly man, to ben an abbot able.
Ful many a deinte hors hadde he in stable:
And when he rode, men mighte his bridel here,
Gyngle in a whistling wind as clere,
And eke as loude as doth the chapell belle,
Ther as this lord was keper of the celle.
The reule of Seint Maure and of Seint Benedit;
Because that it was olde and somdele streit,
This ilke monk lette forby hem pace,
And held after the newe world the space.
He yave not of that text a pulled hen,
That saith, that hunters ben not holy men;—
Therfore he was a prickasoure a right:
Greihoundes he hadde as swift as fowel in flight:
Of pricking and of hunting for the hare
Was all his lust, for no cost wolde he spare.

I saw his sleeves purfiled at the hond
With gris, and that the finest of the lond.
And for to fasten his hood under his chinne,
He had of gold ywrought a curious pinne:
A love-knotte in the greter end ther was.
His hed was balled, and shone as any glas,
And eke his face, as he hadde ben anoint.
He was a lord ful fat and in good point.
His eyen stepe, and rolling in his hed,
That stemed as a forneis of a led.
His botes souple, his hors in gret estat,
Now certainly he was a fayre prelat.

He was not pale as a for-pined gost.
A fat swan loved he best of any rost.
His palfrey was as broune as eny bery."

The Serjeant at Law is the same identical individual as Lawyer Dowling in Tom Jones, who wished to divide himself into a hundred pieces, to be in a hundred places at once:

"No wher so besy a man as he ther n'as,
And yet he semed besier than he was."

The Frankelein, in "whose hous it snewed of mete and drinke;" the Shipman, "who rode upon a rouncie, as he couthe;" the Doctour of Phisike, "whose studie was but litel of the Bible;" the Wif of Bath, in

"All whose parish ther was non,
That to the offring before hire shulde gon,
And if ther did, certain so wroth was she,
That she was out of alle charittee;"—

the poure Persone of a toun, "whose parish was wide, and houses fer asonder;" the Miller, and the Reve, "a slendre colerike man," are all of the same stamp. They are every one samples of a kind; abstract definitions of a species. Chaucer, it has been said, numbered the classes of men as Linnæus numbered the plants. Most of them remain to this day: others that are obsolete, and may well be dispensed with, still live in his descriptions of them. Such is the Sompnoure:

"A Sompnoure was ther with us in that place,
That hadde a fire-red cherubinnes face,
For sausefleme he was, with eyen narwe,
As hote he was, and likerous as a sparwe,
With scalled browes blake, and pilled berd:
Of his visage children were sore aferd.
Ther n'as quicksilver, litarge, ne brimston,
Boras, ceruse, ne oile of tartre non,
Ne oinement that wolde clense or bite,
That him might helpen of his whelkes white,
Ne of the knobbes sitting on his chekes.
Wel loved he garlike, onions, and eklekes,

And for to drinke strong win as rede as blood.
Than wolde he speke, and crie as he were wood.
And whan that he wel dronken had the win,
Than wold he speken no word but Latin.
A fewe termes coude he, two or three,
That he had lerned out of som decree;
No wonder is, he heard it all the day.—

In danger hadde he at his owen assise
The yonge girles of the diocise,
And knew hir conseil, and was al hir rede.
A gerlond hadde he sette upon his hede
As gret as it were for an alestake:
A bokeler hadde he made him of a cake.
With him ther rode a gentil Pardonere—
A voys he hadde as smale as eny gote."

It would be a curious speculation (at least for those who think that the characters of men never change, though manners, opinions, and institutions may) to know what has become of this character of the Sompnoure in the present day; whether or not it has any technical representative in existing professions; into what channels and conduits it has withdrawn itself, where it lurks unseen in cunning obscurity, or else shows its face boldly, pampered into all the insolence of office, in some other shape, as it is deterred or encouraged by circumstances. *Chaucer's characters modernised*, upon this principle of historic derivation, would be an useful addition to our knowledge of human nature. But who is there to undertake it?

The descriptions of the equipage and accoutrements of the two kings of Thrace and Inde, in the Knight's Tale, are as striking and grand, as the others are lively and natural:

"Ther maist thou se coming with Palamon
Licurge himself, the grete king of Trace:
Blake was his berd, and manly was his face.
The cercles of his eyen in his hed
They gloweden betwixen yelwe and red,
And like a griffon loked he about,
With kemped heres on his browes stout;

His limmes gret, his braunes hard and stronge,
His shouldres brode, his arms round and longe.
And as the guise was in his contree,
Ful highe upon a char of gold stood he,
With foure white bolles in the trais.
Instede of cote-armure on his harnais,
With nayles yelwe, and bright as any gold,
He hadde a beres skin, cole-blake for old.
His longe here was kempt behind his bak,
As any ravenes fether it shone for blake.
A wreth of gold arm-gret, and huge of weight,
Upon his hed set full of stones bright,
Of fine rubins and of fine diamants.
About his char wente white alauns,
Twenty and mo, as great as any stere,
To hunten at the leon or the dere,
And folwed him, with mosel fast ybound.—

With Arcita, in stories as men find,
The grete Emetrius, the king of Inde,
Upon a stede bay, trapped in stele,
Covered with cloth of gold diapred wele,
Came riding like the god of armes Mars.
His cote-armure was of a cloth of Tars,
Couched with perles, white, and round and grete.
His sadel was of brent gold new ybete;
A mantelet upon his shouldres hanging
Bret-ful of rubies red, as fire sparkling.
His crispe here like ringes was yronne,
And that was yelwe, and glitteryng as the Sonne.
His nose was high, his eyen were citrin,
His lippes round, his colour was sanguin,
A fewe freknes in his face yspreint,
Betwixe yelwe and somdel blake ymeint,
And as a leon he his loking caste.
Of five and twenty yere his age I caste.
His berd was wel begonne for to spring;
His vois was as a trompe thondering.
Upon his hed he wered of laurer grene
A gerlond freshe and lusty for to sene.
Upon his hond he bare for his delyt
An egle tame, as any lily whit.—
About the king ther ran on every part
Ful many a tame leon and lepart."

What a deal of terrible beauty there is contained in this description! The imagination of a poet brings such objects before us, as when we look at wild beasts in a menagerie; their claws are pared, their eyes glitter like harmless lightning; but we gaze at them with a pleasing awe, clothed in beauty, formidable in the sense of abstract power.

Chaucer's descriptions of natural scenery possess the same sort of characteristic excellence, or what might be termed *gusto*. They have a local truth and freshness, which gives the very feeling of the air, the coolness or moisture of the ground. Inanimate objects are thus made to have a fellow-feeling in the interest of the story; and render back the sentiment of the speaker's mind. One of the finest parts of Chaucer is of this mixed kind. It is the beginning of the Flower and the Leaf,* where he describes the delight of that young beauty, shrouded in her bower, and listening, in the morning of the year, to the singing of the nightingale; while her joy rises with the rising song, and gushes out afresh at every pause, and is borne along with the full tide of pleasure, and still increases, and repeats, and prolongs itself, and knows no ebb. The coolness of the arbour, its retirement, the early time of the day, the sudden starting up of the birds in the neighbouring bushes, the eager delight with which they devour and rend the opening buds and flowers, are expressed with a truth and feeling, which make the whole appear like the recollection of an actual scene:

> "Which as me thought was right a pleasant sight,
> And eke the briddes song for to here,
> Would haue rejoiced any earthly wight,
> And I that couth not yet in no manere
> Heare the nightingale of all the yeare,
> Ful busily herkened with herte and eare,
> If I her voice perceiue coud any where.

---

* Mr. Henry Bradshaw, keeper of the public library at Cambridge, pronounces this poem not to be Chaucer's.—Ed.

And I that all this pleasaunt sight sie,
Thought sodainly I felt so swet an aire
Of the eglentere, that certainely
There is no herte I deme in such despaire,
Ne with thoughts froward and contraire,
So ouerlaid, but it should soone haue bote,
If it had ones felt this savour sote.

And as I stood and cast aside mine eie,
I was ware of the fairest medler tree
That ever yet in all my life I sie
As full of blossomes as it might be,
Therein a goldfinch leaping pretile
Fro bough to bough, and as him list he eet
Here and there of buddes and floures sweet.

And to the herber side was joyning
This faire tree, of which I haue you told,
And at the last the brid began to sing,
Whan he had eaten what he eat wold,
So passing sweetly, that by manifold
It was more pleasaunt than I coud deuise,
And whan his song was ended in this wise,

The nightingale with so merry a note
Answered him, that all the wood rong
So sodainly, that as it were a sote,
I stood astonied, so was I with the song
Thorow rauished, that till late and long,
I ne wist in what place I was, ne where,
And ayen me thought she song euen by mine ere.

Wherefore I waited about busily
On euery side, if I her might see,
And at the last I gan full well aspie
Where she sat in a fresh grene laurer tree,
On the further side euen right by me,
That gaue so passing a delicious smell,
According to the eglentere full well.

Whereof I had so inly great pleasure,
That as me thought I surely rauished was
Into Paradice, where my desire
Was for to be, and no ferther passe
As for that day, and on the sote grasse,
I sat me downe, for as for mine entent,
The birds song was more conuenient.

And more pleasaunt to me by manifold,
Than meat or drinke, or any other thing,
Thereto the herber was so fresh and cold,
The wholesome sauours eke so comforting,
That as I demed, sith the beginning
Of the world was neure seene or than
So pleasaunt a ground of none earthly man.

And as I sat the birds harkening thus,
Me thought that I heard voices sodainly,
The most sweetest and most delicious
That euer any wight I trow truly
Heard in their life, for the armony
And sweet accord was in so good musike,
That the voice to angels was most like."

There is here no affected rapture, no flowery sentiment: the whole is an ebullition of natural delight "welling out of the heart," like water from a crystal spring. Nature is the soul of art: there is a strength as well as a simplicity in the imagination that reposes entirely on nature, that nothing else can supply. It was the same trust in nature, and reliance on his subject, which enabled Chaucer to describe the grief and patience of Griselda, the faith of Constance, and the heroic perseverance of the little child who, going to school through the streets of Jewry,

"Oh *Alma redemptoris mater*, loudly sung,"

and who after his death still triumphed in his song. Chaucer has more of this deep, internal, sustained sentiment than any other writer, except Boccaccio. In depth of simple pathos and intensity of conception, never swerving from his subject, I think no other writer comes near him, not even the Greek tragedians. I wish to be allowed to give one or two instances of what I mean. I will take the following from the Knight's Tale. The distress of Arcite, in consequence of his banishment from his love, is thus described:

"Whan that Arcite to Thebes comen was,
Ful oft a day he swelt and said Alas,

For sene his lady shall he never mo.
And shortly to concluden all his wo,
So mochel sorwe hadde never creature,
That is or shall be, while the world may dure.
His slepe, his mete, his drinke is him byraft.
That lene he wex, and drie as is a shaft.
His eyen holwe, and grisly to behold,
His hewe salwe, and pale as ashen cold,
And solitary he was, and ever alone,
And wailing all the night, making his mone.
And if he herde song or instrument,
Than wold he wepe, he mighte not be stent.
So feble were his spirites, and so low,
And changed so, that no man coude know
His speche ne his vois, though men it herd."

This picture of the sinking of the heart, of the wasting away of the body and mind, of the gradual failure of all the faculties under the contagion of a rankling sorrow, cannot be surpassed. Of the same kind is his farewell to his mistress, after he has gained her hand and lost his life in the combat:

"Alas the wo! alas the peines stronge,
That I for you have suffered, and so longe?
Alas the deth! alas min Emilie!
Alas departing of our compagnie;
Alas min nertes quene? alas my wif!
Min hertes ladie, ender of my lif!
What is this world? what axen men to have?
Now with his love, now in his colde grave
Alone withouten any compagnie."

The death of Arcite is the more affecting, as it comes after triumph and victory, after the pomp of sacrifice, the solemnities of prayer, the celebration of the gorgeous rites of chivalry. The descriptions of the three temples of Mars, of Venus, and Diana, of the ornaments and ceremonies used in each, with the reception given to the offerings of the lovers, have a beauty and grandeur, much of which is lost in Dryden's version. For instance, such lines as the following are not rendered with their true feeling:

"Why shulde I not as well eke tell you all
The purtreiture that was upon the wall
Within the temple of mighty Mars the rede—
That highte the gret temple of Mars in Trace
In thilke colde and frosty region,
Ther as Mars hath his sovereine mansion.
First on the wall was peinted a forest,
In which ther wonneth neyther man ne best,
With knotty knarry barrein trees old
Of stubbes sharpe and hidous to behold;
In which ther ran a romble and a swough,
As though a storme shuld bresten every bough."

And again, among innumerable terrific images of death and slaughter painted on the wall, is this one:

"The statue of Mars upon a carte stood
Armed, and looked grim as he were wood.
A wolf ther stood beforne him at his fete
With eyen red, and of a man he ete."

The story of Griselda is in Boccaccio; but the Clerk of Oxenforde, who tells it, professes to have learned it from Petrarch. This story has gone all over Europe, and has passed into a proverb. In spite of the barbarity of the circumstances, which are abominable, the sentiment remains unimpaired and unalterable. It is of that kind "that heaves no sigh, that sheds no tear;" but it hangs upon the beatings of the heart; it is a part of the very being; it is as inseparable from it as the breath we draw. It is still and calm as the face of death. Nothing can touch it in its ethereal purity: tender as the yielding flower, it is fixed as the marble firmament. The only remonstrance she makes, the only complaint she utters against all the ill-treatment she receives, is that single line where, when turned back naked to her father's house, she says:

"Let me not like a worm go by the way."

The first outline given of the character is inimitable:

"Nought fer fro thilke paleis honourable,
Wher as this markis shope his mariage,

Ther stood a thorpe, of sighte delitable,
In which that poure folk of that village
Hadden hir bestes and herbergage,
And of hir labour toke hir sustenance,
After that the erthe yave hem habundance.

Among this poure folk ther dwelt a man,
Which that was holden pourest of hem all
But highe God somtime senden can
His grace unto a litel oxes stall:
Janicola men of that thorpe him call.
A doughter had he, faire ynough to sight,
And Grisildis this yonge maiden hight.

But for to speke of vertuous beautee,
Than was she on the fairest under Sonne:
Ful pourely yfostred up was she:
No likerous lust was in hire herte yronne;
Ful ofter of the well than of the tonne
She dranke, and for she wolde vertue plese,
She knew wel labour, but non idel ese.

But though this mayden tendre were of age,
Yet in the brest of hire virginitee
Ther was enclosed sad and ripe corage:
And in gret reverence and charitee
Hire olde poure fader fostred she:
A few sheep spinning on the feld she kept,
She wolde not ben idel til she slept.

And whan she homward came she wolde bring
Wortes and other herbes times oft,
The which she shred and sethe for hire living,
And made hire bed ful hard, and nothing soft:
And ay she kept hire fadres lif on loft
With every obeisance and diligence,
That child may don to fadres reverence.

Upon Grisilde, this poure creature,
Ful often sithe this markis sette his sye,
As he on hunting rode paraventure:
And whan it fell that he might hire espie,
He not with wanton loking of folie
His eyen cast on hire, but in sad wise
Upon hire chere he wold him oft avise.

Commending in his herte hire womanhede,
And eke hire vertue, passing any wight

Of so yong age, as wel in chere as dede.
For though the people have no gret insight
In vertue, he considered ful right
Hire bountee, and disposed that he wold
Wedde hire only, if ever he wedden shold.

Grisilde of this (God wot) ful innocent,
That for hire shapen was all this array,
To fetchen water at a welle is went,
And cometh home as sone as ever she may.
For wel she had herd say, that thilke day
The markis shulde wedde, and, if she might,
She wolde fayn han seen som of that sight.

She thought, "I wol with other maidens stond,
That ben my felawes, in our dore, and see
The markisesse, and therto wol I fond
To don at home, as sone as it may be,
The labour which longeth unto me,
And than I may at leiser hire behold,
If she this way unto the castel hold.

And she wolde over the threswold gon,
The markis came and gan hire for to call,
And she set doun her water-pot anon
Beside the threswold in an oxes stall,
And doun upon hire knees she gan to fall.
And with sad countenance kneleth still,
Till she had herd what was the lordes will."

The story of the little child slain in Jewry (which is told by the Prioress, and worthy to be told by her who was "all conscience and tender heart") is not less touching than that of Griselda. It is simple and heroic to the last degree. The poetry of Chaucer has a religious sanctity about it, connected with the manners and superstitions of the age. It has all the spirit of martyrdom.

It has also all the extravagance and the utmost licentiousness of comic humour, equally arising out of the manners of the time. In this too Chaucer resembled Boccaccio, that he excelled in both styles, and could pass at will "from grave to gay, from lively to severe;" but he never confounded the two styles together (except from that involun-

tary and unconscious mixture of the pathetic and humorous, which is almost always to be found in nature), and was exclusively taken up with what he set about, whether it was jest or earnest. The Wife of Bath's Prologue (which Pope has very admirably modernised) is, perhaps, unequalled as a comic story. The Cock and the Fox is also excellent for lively strokes of character and satire. January and May is not so good as some of the others. Chaucer's versification, considering the time at which he wrote, and that versification is a thing in a great degree mechanical, is not one of his least merits. It has considerable strength and harmony, and its apparent deficiency in the latter respect arises chiefly from the alterations which have since taken place in the pronunciation or mode of accenting the words of the language. The best general rule for reading him is to pronounce the final *e*, as in reading Italian.

It was observed in the last Lecture that painting describes what the object is in itself, poetry what it implies or suggests. Chaucer's poetry is not, in general, the best confirmation of the truth of this distinction, for his poetry is more picturesque and historical than almost any other. But there is one instance in point which I cannot help giving in this place. It is the story of the three thieves who go in search of Death to kill him, and who, meeting with him, are entangled in their fate by his words without knowing him. In the printed catalogue to Mr. West's (in some respects very admirable) picture of Death on the Pale Horse, it is observed, that "In poetry the same effect is produced by a few abrupt and rapid gleams of description touching, as it were with fire, the features and edges of a general mass of awful obscurity; but in painting, such indistinctness would be a defect, and imply that the artist wanted the power to portray the conceptions of his fancy. Mr. West was of opinion that to delineate a physical form, which in its moral impression would approximate to that of the visionary Death of Milton, it was

necessary to endow it, if possible, with the appearance of superhuman strength and energy. He has therefore exerted the utmost force and perspicuity of his pencil on the central figure." One might suppose from this, that the way to represent a shadow was to make it as substantial as possible. Oh no! Painting has its prerogatives (and high ones they are), but they lie in representing the visible, not the invisible. The moral attributes of Death are powers and effects of an infinitely wide and general description, which no individual or physical form can possibly represent but by a courtesy of speech, or by a distant analogy. The moral impression of Death is essentially visionary; its reality is in the mind's eye. Words are here the only *things*, and things, physical forms, the mere mockeries of the understanding. The less definite, the less bodily the conception, the more vast, unformed, and unsubstantial, the nearer does it approach to some resemblance of that omnipresent, lasting, universal, irresistible principle, which everywhere, and at some time or other, exerts its power over all things. Death is a mighty abstraction, like Night, or Space, or Time. He is an ugly customer, who will not be invited to supper, or to sit for his picture. He is with us and about us, but we do not see him. He stalks on before us, and we do not mind him: he follows us close behind, and we do not turn to look back at him. We do not see him making faces at us in our life-time, nor perceive him afterwards sitting in mock-majesty, a twin-skeleton, beside us, tickling our bare ribs and staring into our hollow eye-balls! Chaucer knew this. He makes three riotous companions go in search of Death to kill him; they meet with an old man whom they reproach with his age, and ask why he does not die, to which he answers thus:

> "Ne Deth, alas! he will not han my lif.
> Thus walke I like a restless caitiff,
> And on the ground, which is my modres gate,
> I knocke with my staf, erlich and late,

I say to hire, 'Leve mother, let me in.
Lo, how I vanish, flesh and blood and skin,
Alas! when shall my bones ben at reste?
Mother, when you wolde I changen my cheste,
That in my chambre longe time hath be,
Ye, for an heren cloute to wrap in me.'
But yet to me she will not don that grace,
For which ful pale and welked is my face."

They then ask the old man where they shall find out Death to kill him, and he sends them on an errand which ends in the death of all three. We hear no more of him, but it is Death that they have encountered!

The interval between Chaucer and Spenser is long and dreary. There is nothing to fill up the chasm but the names of Occleve, "ancient Gower," Lydgate, Wyatt, Surrey, and Sackville. Spenser flourished in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and was sent with Sir John Davies into Ireland, of which he has left behind him some tender recollections in his description of the bog of Allan, and a record in an ably written paper, containing observations on the state of that country and the means of improving it, which remain in full force to the present day.* Spenser died at an obscure inn in London, it is supposed in distressed circumstances. The treatment he received from Burleigh is well known. Spenser, as well as Chaucer, was engaged in active life; but the genius of his poetry was not active; it is inspired by the love of ease, and relaxation from all the cares and business of life. Of all the poets, he is the most poetical. Though much later than Chaucer, his obligations to preceding writers were less. He has in some measure borrowed the plan of his poem (as a number of distinct narratives) from Ariosto; but he has engrafted

* This was written in 1818, but unfortunately is not an obsolete remark in 1869. Mr. Richard Morris, in his new edition of Spenser's works, has, by a collation of MSS. copies of the poet's treatise on Ireland, restored the text to something more like its original purity.—Ed.

upon it an exuberance of fancy, and an endless voluptuousness of sentiment, which are not to be found in the Italian writer. Further, Spenser is even more of an inventor in the subject-matter. There is an originality, richness, and variety in his allegorical personages and fictions, which almost vies with the splendour of the ancient mythology. If Ariosto transports us into the regions of romance, Spenser's poetry is all fairy-land. In Ariosto, we walk upon the ground, in a company, gay, fantastic, and adventurous enough. In Spenser, we wander in another world among ideal beings. The poet takes and lays us in the lap of a lovelier nature, by the sound of softer streams, among greener hills and fairer valleys. He paints nature, not as we find it, but as we expected to find it, and fulfils the delightful promise of our youth. He waves his wand of enchantment, and at once embodies airy beings, and throws a delicious veil over all actual objects. The two worlds of reality and of fiction are poised on the wings of his imagination. His ideas, indeed, seem more distinct than his perceptions. He is the painter of abstractions, and describes them with dazzling minuteness. In the Mask of Cupid he makes the God of Love "clap on high his coloured wings *twain*:" and it is said of Gluttony, in the Procession of the Passions:

> "In green vine leaves he was right fitly clad."

At times he becomes picturesque from his intense love of beauty; as where he compares Prince Arthur's crest to the appearance of the almond tree:

> "Upon the top of all his lofty crest,
> A bunch of hairs discolour'd diversely
> With sprinkled pearl and gold full richly drest
> Did shake, and seem'd to daunce for jollity;
> Like to an almond tree ymounted high
> On top of green Selenis all alone,
> With blossoms brave bedecked daintily;
> Her tender locks do tremble every one
> At every little breath that under heav'n is blown."

The love of beauty, however, and not of truth, is the moving principle of his mind; and he is guided in his fantastic delineations by no rule but the impulse of an inexhaustible imagination. He luxuriates equally in scenes of Eastern magnificence or the still solitude of a hermit's cell, in the extremes of sensuality or refinement.

In reading the Faëry Queen, you see a little withered old man by a wood-side opening a wicket, a giant, and a dwarf lagging far behind, a damsel in a boat upon an enchanted lake, wood-nymphs, and satyrs; and all of a sudden you are transported into a lofty palace, with tapers burning, amidst knights and ladies, with dance and revelry, and song, "and mask, and antique pageantry." What can be more solitary, more shut up in itself, than his description of the house of Sleep, to which Archimago sends for a dream:

> "And more to lull him in his slumber soft
> A trickling stream from high rock tumbling down,
> And ever-drizzling rain upon the loft,
> Mix'd with a murmuring wind, much like the sound
> Of swarming Bees, did cast him in a swound.
> No other noise, nor people's troublous cries.
> That still are wont t' annoy the walled town
> Might there be heard; but careless Quiet lies
> Wrapt in eternal silence, far from enemies."

It is as if "the honey-heavy dew of slumber" had settled on his pen in writing these lines. How different in the subject (and yet how like in beauty) is the following description of the Bower of Bliss:

> "Eftsoones they heard a most melodious sound
> Of all that mote delight a daintie eare;
> Such as attonce might not on living ground,
> Save in this Paradise, be heard elsewhere:
> Right hard it was for wight which did it heare,
> To tell what manner musicke that mote bee;
> For all that pleasing is to living eare
> Was there consorted in one harmonee:
> Birdes, voices, instruments, windes, waters, all agree.

The joyous birdes shrouded in chearefull shade
Their notes unto the voice attempred sweet:
Th' angelical soft trembling voyces made
To th' instruments divine respondence meet.
The silver sounding instruments did meet
With the base murmur of the waters fall;
The water's fall with difference discreet,
Now soft, now loud, unto the wind did call:
The gentle warbling wind low answered to all."

The remainder of the passage has all that voluptuous pathos and languid brilliancy of fancy, in which this writer excelled:

"The whiles some one did chaunt this lovely lay;
Ah! see, whoso fayre thing doest faine to see,
In springing flowre the image of thy day!
Ah! see the Virgin Rose, how sweetly shee
Doth first peepe foorth with bashfull modestee,
That fairer seemes the lesse ye see her may!
Lo! see soone after, how more bold and free
Her bared bosome she doth broad display;
Lo! see soone after how she fades and falls away!

So passeth in the passing of a day
Of mortal life the leafe, the bud, the flowre;
Ne more doth florish after first decay,
That earst was sought to deck both bed and bowre
Of many a lady and many a Paramowre!
Gather therefore the Rose whilest yet is prime,
For soon comes age that will her pride deflowre;
Gather the Rose of love whilest yet is time,
Whilest loving thou mayest loved be with equall crime.*

He ceast'; and then gan all the quire of birdes
Their diverse notes t' attune unto his lay,
As in approvaunce of his pleasing wordes.
The constant payre heard all that he did say,
Yet swarved not, but kept their forward way
Through many covert groves and thickets close,
In which they creeping did at last display †
That wanton lady with her lover lose,
Whose slcepie head she in her lap did soft dispose.

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* Taken from Tasso.

† Spenser's Poems, ed. Morris, pp. 152-3.—Ed.

Upon a bed of Roses she was laid
As faint through heat, or dight to pleasant sin;
And was arayd or rather disarayd,
All in a vele of silke and silver thin,
That hid no whit her alablaster skin,
But rather shewd more white, if more might bee:
More subtile web Arachne cannot spin;
Nor the fine nets, which oft we woven see
Of scorched deaw, do not in th' ayre more lightly flee.

Her snowy brest was bare to ready spoyle
Of hungry eies which n' ote therewith be fild;
And yet through languour of her late sweet toyle
Few drops more cleare than Nectar forth distild,
That like pure Orient perles adown it trild;
And her faire eyes sweet smyling in delight
Moystened their fiery beames, with which she thrild
Fraile harts, yet quenched not; like starry light,
Which sparckling on the silent waves does seeme more bright."

The finest things in Spenser are, the character of Una in the first book, the House of Pride, the Cave of Mammon, and the Cave of Despair: the account of Memory, of whom it is said, among other things:

> "The wars he well remember'd of King Nine,
> Of old Assaracus and Inachus divine;"

the description of Belphœbe; the story of Florimel and the Witch's son; the gardens of Adonis, and the Bower of Bliss; the Mask of Cupid; and Colin Clout's vision, in the last book. But some people will say that all this may be very fine, but that they cannot understand it on account of the allegory. They are afraid of the allegory, as if they thought it would bite them: they look at it as a child looks at a painted dragon, and think it will strangle them in its shining folds. This is very idle. If they do not meddle with the allegory, the allegory will not meddle with them. Without minding it at all, the whole is as plain as a pike-staff. It might as well be pretended that we cannot see Poussin's pictures for the allegory, as that the allegory prevents us from understanding Spenser.

For instance, when Britomart, seated amidst young warriors, lets fall her hair and discovers her sex, is it necessary to know the part she plays in the allegory, to understand the beauty of the following stanza?

"And eke that stranger knight amongst the rest
Was for like need enforc'd to disarray.
Tho when as vailed was her lofty crest,
Her golden locks that were in trammels gay
Upbounden, did themselves adown display,
And raught unto her heels like sunny beams
That in a cloud their light did long time stay;
Their vapour faded, shew their golden gleams,
And through the persant air shoot forth their azure streams."

Or is there any mystery in what is said of Belphœbe, that her hair was sprinkled with flowers and blossoms which had been entangled in it as she fled through the woods? Or is it necessary to have a more distinct idea of Proteus, than that which is given of him in his boat, with the frighted Florimel at his feet, while

"—— the cold icicles from his rough beard
Dropped adown upon her snowy breast?

Or is it not a sufficient account of one of the sea-gods that pass by them, to say:

"That was Arion crowned:—
So went he playing on the watery plain."

Or to take the Procession of the Passions that draw the coach of Pride, in which the figures of Idleness, of Gluttony, of Lechery, of Avarice, of Envy, and of Wrath speak, one should think, plain enough for themselves; such as this of Gluttony:*

"And by his side rode loathsome Gluttony,
Deformed creature, on a filthie swyne;
His belly was upblowne with luxury;
And eke with fatnesse swollen were his eyne;
And like a Crane his necke was long and fyne,
With which he swallowed up excessive feast,
For want whereof poore people oft did pyne.

* Spenser's Works, ed. Morris, p. 29.—Ed.

In green vine leaves he was right fitly clad,
For other clothes he could not weare for heate:
And on his head an yvie girland had,
From under which fast trickled downe the sweat:
Still as he rode, he somewhat still did eat.
And in his hand did beare a bouzing can,
Of which he supt so oft, that on his seat
His dronken corse he scarce upholden can;
In shape and life more like a monster then a man."

Or this of Lechery:

"And next to him rode lustfull Lechery
Upon a bearded Gote, whose rugged heare
And whally eyes (the signe of gelosy)
Was like the person selfe whom he did beare:
Who roughe and blacke, and filthy did appear.
Unseemely man to please fair Ladies eye:
Yet he of ladies oft was loved deare,
When fairer faces were bid standen by:
O! who does know the bent of womens fantasy?

In a greene gowne he clothed was full faire,
Which underneath did hide his filthiness;
And in his hand a burning hart he bare,
Full of vain follies and new fanglenesse;
For he was false and fraught with ficklenesse,
And learned had to love with secret lookes;
And well could daunce, and sing with ruefulnesse;
And fortunes tell, and read in loving bookes;
And thousand other waies to bait his fleshly hookes.

Inconstant man that loved all he saw,
And lusted after all that he did love;
Ne would his looser life be tied to law;
But joyd weak womens hearts to tempt and prove,
If from their loyall loves he might them move."

This is pretty plain-spoken. Mr. Southey says of Spenser:

"——— Yet not more sweet
Than pure was he, and not more pure than wise;
High priest of all the Muses' mysteries!"

On the contrary, no one was more apt to pry into mysteries which do not strictly belong to the Muses.

Of the same kind with the Procession of the Passions, as little obscure, and still more beautiful, is the Mask of Cupid, with his train of votaries:

"The first was Fancy, like a lovely boy,
Of rare aspect, and beauty without peer;

His garment neither was of silk nor say,
But painted plumes in goodly order dight,
Like as the sun-burnt Indians do array
Their tawny bodies in their proudest plight:
As those same plumes so seem'd he vain and light,
That by his gait might easily appear;
For still he far'd as dancing in delight,
And in his hand a windy fan did bear
That in the idle air he mov'd still here and there.

And him beside march'd amorous Desire,
Who seem'd of riper years than th' other swain,
Yet was that other swain this elder's sire,
And gave him being, common to them twain:
His garment was disguised very vain,
And his embroidered bonnet sat awry;
Twixt both his hands few sparks he close did strain,
Which still he blew, and kindled busily,
That soon they life conceiv'd and forth in flames did fly.

Next after him went Doubt, who was yclad
In a discolour'd coat of strange disguise,
That at his back a broad capuccio had,
And sleeves dependant *Albanese-wise;*
He lookt askew with his mistrustful eyes,
And nicely trod, as thorns lay in his way,
Or that the floor to shrink he did avise;
And on a broken reed he still did stay
His feeble steps, which shrunk when hard thereon he lay.

With him went Daunger, cloth'd in ragged weed,
Made of bear's skin, that him more dreadful made
Yet his own face was dreadfull, ne did need
Strange horror to deform his grissly shade;
A net in th' one hand, and a rusty blade
In th' other was; this Mischiefe, that Mishap;
With th' one his foes he threat'ned to invade,
With th' other he his friends meant to enwrap;
For whom he could not kill he practiz'd to entrap.

Next him was Fear, all arm'd from top to toe,
Yet thought himselfe not safe enough thereby,
But fear'd each shadow moving to and fro;
And his own arms when glittering he did spy,
Or clashing heard, he fast away did fly,
As ashes pale of hue, and winged-heel'd;
And evermore on Daunger fixt his eye,
'Gainst whom he always bent a brazen shield,
Which his right hand unarmed fearfully did wield.

With him went Hope in rank, a handsome maid,
Of chearfull look and lovely to behold;
In silken samite she was light array'd,
And her fair locks were woven up in gold;
She always smil'd, and in her hand did hold
An holy-water sprinkle dipt in dew,
With which she sprinkled favours manifold
On whom she list, and did great liking shew:
Great liking unto many, but true love to few.

Next after them, the winged God himself
Came riding on a lion ravenous,
Taught to obey the menage of that elfe
That man and beast with power imperious
Subdueth to his kingdom tyrannous:
His blindfold eyes he bade awhile unbind,
That his proud spoil of that same dolorous
Fair dame he might behold in perfect kind;
Which seen, he much rejoiced in his cruel mind.

Of which full proud, himself uprearing high,
He looked round about with stern disdain,
And did survey his goodly company:
And marshalling the evil-ordered train,
With that the darts which his right hand did strain,
Full dreadfully he shook, that all did quake,
And clapt on high his colour'd winges twain,
That all his many it afraid did make:
Tho blinding him again, his way he forth did take."

The description of Hope, in this series of historical portraits, is one of the most beautiful in Spenser: and the triumph of Cupid at the mischief he has made is worthy of the malicious urchin deity. In reading these descriptions, one can hardly avoid being reminded of Rubens'

allegorical pictures; but the account of Satyrane taming the lion's whelps and lugging the bear's cubs along in his arms while yet an infant, whom his mother so naturally advises to "go seek some other play-fellows," has even more of this high picturesque character. Nobody but Rubens could have painted the fancy of Spenser; and he could not have given the sentiment, the airy dream that hovers over it!

With all this, Spenser neither makes us laugh nor weep. The only jest in his poem is an allegorical play upon words, where he describes Malbecco as escaping in the herd of goats, "by the help of his fayre horns on hight." But he has been unjustly charged with a want of passion and of strength. He has both in an immense degree. He has not indeed the pathos of immediate action or suffering, which is more properly the dramatic; but he has all the pathos of sentiment and romance—all that belongs to distant objects of terror, and uncertain, imaginary distress. His strength, in like manner, is not strength of will or action, of bone and muscle, nor is it coarse and palpable—but it assumes a character of vastness and sublimity seen through the same visionary medium, and blended with the appalling associations of preternatural agency. We need only turn, in proof of this, to the Cave of Despair, or the Cave of Mammon, or to the account of the change of Malbecco into Jealousy. The following stanzas, in the description of the Cave of Mammon, the grisly house of Plutus, are unrivalled for the portentous massiness of the forms, the splendid chiaro-oscuro, and shadowy horror:

"That house's form within was rude and strong,
Like an huge cave hewn out of rocky clift,
From whose rough vault the ragged breaches hung,
Embossed with massy gold of glorious gift,
And with rich metal loaded every rift,
That heavy ruin they did seem to threat:
And over them Arachne high did lift

Her cunning web, and spread her subtle net,
Enwrapped in foul smoke, and clouds more black than jet.

Both roof and floor, and walls, were all of gold,
But overgrown with dust and old decay,*
And hid in darkness that none could behold
The hue thereof: for view of cheerful day
Did never in that house itself display,
But a faint shadow of uncertain light;
Such as a lamp whose life doth fade away;
Or as the moon clothed with cloudy night
Does shew to him that walks in fear and sad affright.
* * * * * * *
And over all sad Horror with grim hue
Did always soar, beating his iron wings;
And after him owls and night-ravens flew,
The hateful messengers of heavy things,
Of death and dolour telling sad tidings;
Whiles sad Celleno, sitting on a clift,
A song of bitter bale and sorrow sings,
That heart of flint asunder could have rift,
Which having ended, after him she flieth swift."

The Cave of Despair is described with equal gloominess and power of fancy; and the fine moral declamation of the owner of it on the evils of life almost makes one in love with death. In the story of Malbecco, who is haunted by Jealousy, and in vain strives to run away from his own thoughts—

"High over hill and over dale he flies"—

the truth of human passion and the preternatural ending are equally striking. It is not fair to compare Spenser with Shakspeare in point of interest. A fairer comparison would be with Comus; and the result would not be unfavourable to Spenser. There is only one work of the same allegorical kind, which has more interest than

* "That all with one consent praise new-born gauds,
Tho' they are made and moulded of things past,
And give to Dust, that is a little gilt,
More laud than gold o'er-dusted."
[Shakspeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, iii. 3.]

Spenser (with scarcely less imagination): and that is the Pilgrim's Progress. The three first books of the Faëry Queen are very superior to the three last. One would think that Pope, who used to ask if any one had ever read the Faëry Queen through, had only dipped into these last. The only things in them equal to the former are the account of Talus, the Iron Man, and the delightful episode of Pastorella.

The language of Spenser is full and copious to overflowing: it is less pure and idiomatic than Chaucer's, and is enriched and adorned with phrases borrowed from the different languages of Europe, both ancient and modern. He was, probably, seduced into a certain license of expression by the difficulty of filling up the moulds of his complicated rhymed stanza from the limited resources of his native language. This stanza, with alternate and repeatedly recurring rhymes, is borrowed from the Italians. It was peculiarly fitted to their language, which abounds in similar vowel terminations, and is as little adapted to ours, from the stubborn, unaccommodating resistance which the consonant endings of the northern languages make to this sort of endless sing-song. Not that I would, on that account, part with the stanza of Spenser. We are, perhaps, indebted to this very necessity of finding out new forms of expression, and to the occasional faults to which it led, for a poetical language rich and varied and magnificent beyond all former, and almost all later, example. His versification is at once the most smooth and the most sounding in the language. It is a labyrinth of sweet sounds, "in many a winding bout of linked sweetness long drawn out," that would cloy by their very sweetness, but that the ear is constantly relieved and enchanted by their continued variety of modulation, dwelling on the pauses of the action, or flowing on in a fuller tide of harmony with the movement of the sentiment. It has not the bold dramatic transitions of Shak-

speare's blank verse, nor the high-raised tone of Milton's; but it is the perfection of melting harmony, dissolving the soul in pleasure, or holding it captive in the chains of suspense. Spenser was the poet of our waking dreams; and he has invented not only a language, but a music of his own for them. The undulations are infinite, like those of the waves of the sea; but the effect is still the same, lulling the senses into a deep oblivion of the jarring noises of the world, from which we have no wish to be ever recalled.

LECTURE III.

ON SHAKSPEARE AND MILTON.

In looking back to the great works of genius in former times, we are sometimes disposed to wonder at the little progress which has since been made in poetry, and in the arts of imitation in general. But this is perhaps a foolish wonder. Nothing can be more contrary to the fact, than the supposition that in what we understand by the *fine arts*, as painting and poetry, relative perfection is only the result of repeated efforts in successive periods, and that what has been once well done, constantly leads to something better. What is mechanical, reducible to rule, or capable of demonstration, is progressive, and admits of gradual improvement: what is not mechanical, or definite, but depends on feeling, taste, and genius, very soon becomes stationary or retrograde, and loses more than it gains by transfusion. The contrary opinion is a vulgar error which has grown up, like many others, from transferring an analogy of one kind to something quite distinct, without taking into the account the difference in the nature of the things, or attending to the difference of the results. For most persons, finding what wonderful advances have been made in biblical criticism, in chemistry, in mechanics, in geometry, astronomy, &c., *i. e.* in things depending on mere inquiry and experiment or on absolute demonstration, have been led hastily to conclude that there was a general tendency in the efforts of the human intellect to improve by repetition, and, in all other arts and institutions, to grow perfect and mature by time.

We look back upon the theological creed of our ancestors,* and their discoveries in natural philosophy, with a smile of pity: science, and the arts connected with it, have all had their infancy, their youth and manhood, and seem to contain in them no principle of limitation or decay: and, inquiring no further about the matter, we infer in the intoxication of our pride and the height of our self-congratulation, that the same progress has been made, and will continue to be made, in all other things which are the work of man. The fact, however, stares us so plainly in the face, that one would think the smallest reflection must suggest the truth, and overturn our sanguine theories. The greatest poets, the ablest orators, the best painters, and the finest sculptors that the world ever saw, appeared soon after the birth of these arts, and lived in a state of society which was, in other respects, comparatively barbarous. Those arts, which depend on individual genius and incommunicable power, have always leaped at once from infancy to manhood, from the first rude dawn of invention to their meridian height and dazzling lustre, and have in general declined ever after. This is the peculiar distinction and privilege of each, of science and of art: of the one, never to attain its utmost limit of perfection; and of the other, to arrive at it almost at once. Homer, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakspeare, Dante, and Ariosto (Milton alone was of a later age, and not the worse for it): Raphael, Titian, Michael Angelo, Correggio, Cervantes, and Boccaccio: the Greek sculptors and tragedians: all lived near the beginning of their arts, perfected, and all but created them. These giant-sons of genius stand indeed upon the earth, but they tower above their fellows; and the long line of their successors, in different ages, does not interpose any object to obstruct their view, or

* The high-churchmen of the present day cling, on the contrary, with singular tenacity to the "theological creed of our ancestors," without, perhaps, being aware of it.—Ed.

lessen their brightness. In strength and stature they are unrivalled; in grace and beauty they have not been surpassed. In after-ages and more refined periods (as they are called) great men have arisen, one by one, as it were by throes and at intervals; though in general the best of these cultivated and artificial minds were of an inferior order, as Tasso and Pope among poets: Guido and Vandyke among painters. But in the earlier stages of the arts, as soon as the first mechanical difficulties had been got over, and the language was sufficiently acquired, they rose by clusters and in constellations, never so to rise again!

The arts of painting and poetry are conversant with the world of thought within us, and with the world of sense around us—with what we know, and see, and feel intimately. They flow from the sacred shrine of our own breasts, and are kindled at the living lamp of nature. But the pulse of the passions assuredly beat as high, the depths and soundings of the human heart were as well understood three thousand or three hundred years ago, as they are at present: the face of nature and "the human face divine" shone as bright then as they have ever done. But it is *their* light, reflected by true genius on art, that marks out its path before it, and sheds a glory round the Muses' feet, like that which

> "Circled Una's angel face,
> And made a sunshine in the shady place."

The four greatest names in English poetry are almost the four first we come to: Chaucer, Spenser, Shakspeare, and Milton. There are no others that can really be put in competition with these. The two last have had justice done them by the voice of common fame. Their names are blazoned in the very firmament of reputation; while the two first (though "the fault has been more in their stars than in themselves that they are underlings"), either never emerged far above the horizon, or were too soon involved in the obscurity of time. The three first of

these are excluded from Dr. Johnson's Lives of the Poets * (Shakspeare indeed is so from the dramatic form of his compositions): and the fourth, Milton, is admitted with a reluctant and churlish welcome.

In comparing these four writers together, it might be said that Chaucer excels as the poet of manners, or of real life; Spenser, as the poet of romance; Shakspeare as the poet of nature (in the largest use of the term); and Milton, as the poet of morality. Chaucer most frequently describes things as they are; Spenser, as we wish them to be; Shakspeare, as they would be; and Milton as they ought to be. As poets, and as great poets, imagination, that is, the power of feigning things according to nature, was common to them all: but the principle or moving power, to which this faculty was most subservient in Chaucer, was habit or inveterate prejudice; in Spenser, novelty, and the love of the marvellous; in Shakspeare, it was the force of passion, combined with every variety of possible circumstances; and in Milton, [combined] only with the highest. The characteristic of Chaucer is intensity; of Spenser, remoteness; of Milton, elevation; of Shakspeare, everything. It has been said by some critic, that Shakspeare was distinguished from the other dramatic writers of his day only by his wit; that they had all his other qualities but that; that one writer had as much sense, another as much fancy, another as much knowledge of character, another the same depth of passion, and another as great a power of language. This statement is not true; nor is the inference from it well-founded, even if it were. This person does not seem to have been aware that, upon his own showing, the great distinction of Shakspeare's genius was its virtually including the genius of all the great men of his age, and not h s differing from them in one accidental particular. But to have done with such minute and literal trifling.

* This work does not comprise any writer anterior to Cowley.—Ed.

The striking peculiarity of Shakspeare's mind was its generic quality, its power of communication with all other minds, so that it contained a universe of thought and feeling within itself, and had no one peculiar bias or exclusive excellence more than another. He was just like any other man, but that he was like all other men. He was the least of an egotist that it was possible to be. He was nothing in himself; but he was all that others were, or that they could become. He not only had in himself the germs of every faculty and feeling, but he could follow them by anticipation, intuitively, into all their conceivable ramifications, through every change of fortune or conflict of passion, or turn of thought. He had "a mind reflecting ages past" and present: all the people that ever lived are there. There was no respect of persons with him. His genius shone equally on the evil and on the good, on the wise and the foolish, the monarch and the beggar. "All corners of the earth, kings, queens, and states, maids, matrons, nay, the secrets of the grave," are hardly hid from his searching glance. He was like the genius of humanity, changing places with all of us at pleasure, and playing with our purposes as with his own. He turned the globe round for his amusement, and surveyed the generations of men, and the individuals as they passed, with their different concerns, passions, follies, vices, virtues, actions, and motives—as well those that they knew, as those which they did not know, or acknowledge to themselves. The dreams of childhood, the ravings of despair, were the toys of his fancy. Airy beings waited at his call, and came at his bidding. Harmless fairies "nodded to him, and did him courtesies:" and the night-hag bestrode the blast at the command of "his so potent art." The world of spirits lay open to him, like the world of real men and women: and there is the same truth in his delineations of the one as of the other; for if the preternatural characters he describes

could be supposed to exist, they would speak, and feel, and act, as he makes them. He had only to think of anything in order to become that thing, with all the circumstances belonging to it. When he conceived of a character, whether real or imaginary, he not only entered into all its thoughts and feelings, but seemed instantly, and as if by touching a secret spring, to be surrounded with all the same objects, "subject to the same skyey influences," the same local, outward, and unforeseen accidents which would occur in reality. Thus the character of Caliban not only stands before us with a language and manners of its own, but the scenery and situation of the enchanted island he inhabits, the traditions of the place, its strange noises, its hidden recesses, "his frequent haunts and ancient neighbourhood," are given with a miraculous truth of nature, and with all the familiarity of an old recollection. The whole "coheres semblably together" in time, place, and circumstance. In reading this author, you do not merely learn what his characters say: you see their persons. By something expressed or understood, you are at no loss to decipher their peculiar physiognomy, the meaning of a look, the grouping, the by-play, as we might see it on the stage. A word, an epithet, paints a whole scene, or throws us back whole years in the history of the person represented. So (as it has been ingeniously remarked) when Prospero describes himself as left alone in the boat with his daughter, the epithet which he applies to her, "Me and thy *crying* self," flings the imagination instantly back from the grown woman to the helpless condition of infancy, and places the first and most trying scene of his misfortunes before us, with all that he must have suffered in the interval. How well the silent anguish of Macduff is conveyed to the reader, by the friendly expostulation of Malcolm: "What, man! ne'er pull your hat upon your brows." Again, Hamlet, in the scene with Rosencrantz and Guilden-

stern, somewhat abruptly concludes his fine soliloquy on life by saying, "Man delights not me, nor woman neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so." Which is explained by their answer—"My lord, we had no such stuff in our thoughts. But we smiled to think, if you delight not in man, what lenten entertainment the players shall receive from you, whom we met on the way:"—as if, while Hamlet was making this speech, his two old schoolfellows from Wittenberg had been really standing by, and he had seen them smiling by stealth at the idea of the players crossing their minds. It is not "a combination and a form" of words, a set speech or two, a preconcerted theory of a character, that will do this: but all the persons concerned must have been present in the poet's imagination, as at a kind of rehearsal; and whatever would have passed through their minds on the occasion, and have been observed by others, passed through his, and is made known to the reader. I may add in passing, that Shakspeare always gives the best directions for the costume and carriage of his heroes. Thus to take one example, Ophelia gives the following account of Hamlet; and as Ophelia had seen Hamlet, I should think her word ought to be taken against that of any modern authority:

> "*Ophelia.* My lord, as I was sewing in my closet,
> Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbrac'd,
> No hat upon his head, his stockings foul'd,
> Ungartered, and down-gyvèd to his ancle,
> Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other,
> And with a look so piteous in purport,
> As if he had been loo-èd out of hell
> To speak of horrors—he comes before me.
> *Polonius.* Mad for thy love!
> *Oph.* My lord, I do not know,
> But, truly, I do fear it.
> *Pol.* What said he?
> *Oph.* He took me by the wrist, and held me hard;
> Then goes he to the length of all his arm;
> And, with his other hand thus o'er his brow,

He falls to such perusal of my face,
As he would draw it. Long staid he so;
At last, a little shaking of mine arm,
And thrice his head thus waving up and down,
He rais'd a sigh so piteous and profound,
As it did seem to shatter all his bulk,
And end his being. That done, he lets me go,
And with his head o'er his shoulder turn'd,
He seem'd to find his way without his eyes;
For out o' doors he went without their help,
And, to the last, bended their light on me." *

How after this airy, fantastic idea of irregular grace and bewildered melancholy any one can play Hamlet, as we have seen it played, with strut, and stare, and antic, right-angled, sharp-pointed gestures, it is difficult to say, unless it be that Hamlet is not bound, by the prompter's cue, to study the part of Ophelia. The account of Ophelia's death begins thus:

"There is a willow hanging o'er a brook,
That shows its hoary leaves in the glassy stream."

Now this is an instance of the same unconscious power of mind which is as true to nature as itself. The leaves of the willow are, in fact, white underneath, and it is this part of them which would appear "hoary" in the reflection in the brook. The same sort of intuitive power, the same faculty of bringing every object in nature, whether present or absent, before the mind's eye, is observable in the speech of Cleopatra, when conjecturing what were the employments of Antony in his absence: "He's speaking now, or murmuring, where's my serpent of old Nile?" How fine to make Cleopatra have this consciousness of her own character, and to make her feel that it is this for which Antony is in love with her! She says, after the battle of Actium, when Antony has resolved to risk another fight, "It is my birth-day; I had thought to have held it poor: but since my lord is Antony again, I will be Cleopatra." What

* Act II. Scene 1.

other poet would have thought of such a casual resource of the imagination, or would have dared to avail himself of it? The thing happens in the play as it might have happened in fact. That which, perhaps, more than anything else distinguishes the dramatic productions of Shakspeare from all others, is this wonderful truth and individuality of conception. Each of his characters is as much itself, and as absolutely independent of the rest as well as of the author, as if they were living persons, not fictions of the mind. The poet may be said, for the time, to identify himself with the character he wishes to represent, and to pass from one to another, like the same soul successively animating different bodies. By an art like that of the ventriloquist, he throws his imagination out of himself, and makes every word appear to proceed from the mouth of the person in whose name it is given. His plays alone are properly expressions of the passions, not descriptions of them. His characters are real beings of flesh and blood; they speak like men, not like authors. One might suppose that he had stood by at the time, and overheard what passed. As in our dreams we hold conversations with ourselves, make remarks, or communicate intelligence, and have no idea of the answer which we shall receive, and which we ourselves make, till we hear it: so the dialogues in Shakspeare are carried on without any consciousness of what is to follow, without any appearance of preparation or premeditation. The gusts of passion come and go like sounds of music borne on the wind. Nothing is made out by formal inference and analogy, by climax and antithesis: all comes, or seems to come, immediately from nature. Each object and circumstance exists in his mind, as it would have existed in reality: each several train of thought and feeling goes on of itself, without confusion or effort. In the world of his imagination, everything has a life, a place and being of its own!

Chaucer's characters are sufficiently distinct from one

another, but they are too little varied in themselves, too much like identical propositions. They are consistent, but uniform; we get no new idea of them from first to last; they are not placed in different lights, nor are their subordinate *traits* brought out in new situations; they are like portraits or physiognomical studies, with the distinguishing features marked with inconceivable truth and precision, but that preserve the same unaltered air and attitude. Shakspeare's are historical figures, equally true and correct, but put into action, where every nerve and muscle is displayed in the struggle with others, with all the effect of collision and contrast, with every variety of light and shade. Chaucer's characters are narrative, Shakspeare's dramatic, Milton's epic. That is, Chaucer told only as much of his story as he pleased, as was required for a particular purpose. He answered for his characters himself. In Shakspeare they are introduced upon the stage, are liable to be asked all sorts of questions, and are forced to answer for themselves. In Chaucer we perceive a fixed essence of character. In Shakspeare there is a continual composition and decomposition of its elements, a fermentation of every particle in the whole mass, by its alternate affinity or antipathy to other principles which are brought in contact with it. Till the experiment is tried, we do not know the result, the turn which the character will take in its new circumstances. Milton took only a few simple principles of character, and raised them to the utmost conceivable grandeur, and refined them from every base alloy. His imagination, "nigh sphered in Heaven," claimed kindred only with what he saw from that height, and could raise to the same elevation with itself. He sat retired and kept his state alone, "playing with wisdom;" while Shakspeare mingled with the crowd, and played the host, "to make society the sweeter welcome."

The passion in Shakspeare is of the same nature as his delineation of character. It is not some one habitual feel-

ing or sentiment preying upon itself, growing out of itself, and moulding everything to itself; it is passion modified by passion, by all the other feelings to which the individual is liable, and to which others are liable with him; subject to all the fluctuations of caprice and accident; calling into play all the resources of the understanding and all the energies of the will; irritated by obstacles or yielding to them; rising from small beginnings to its utmost height; now drunk with hope, now stung to madness, now sunk in despair, now blown to air with a breath, now raging like a torrent. The human soul is made the sport of fortune, the prey of adversity: it is stretched on the wheel of destiny, in restless ecstasy. The passions are in a state of projection. Years are melted down to moments, and every instant teems with fate. We know the results, we see the process. Thus after Iago has been boasting to himself of the effect of his poisonous suggestions on the mind of Othello, which, "with a little act upon the blood, burn like the mines of sulphur," he adds:

> "Look where he comes! not poppy, nor mandragora,
> Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world,
> Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep
> Which thou ow'dst yesterday."

And he enters at this moment, like the crested serpent, crowned with his wrongs and raging for revenge! The whole depends upon the turn of a thought. A word, a look, blows the spark of jealousy into a flame; and the explosion is immediate and terrible as a volcano. The dialogues in Lear, in Macbeth, that between Brutus and Cassius, and nearly all those in Shakspeare, where the interest is wrought up to its highest pitch, afford examples of this dramatic fluctuation of passion. The interest in Chaucer is quite different; it is like the course of a river, strong, and full, and increasing. In Shakspeare, on the contrary, it is like the sea, agitated this way and that, and loud-lashed by furious storms; while in the still pauses

of the blast we distinguish only the cries of despair, or the silence of death! Milton, on the other hand, takes the imaginative part of passion—that which remains after the event, which the mind reposes on when all is over, which looks upon circumstances from the remotest elevation of thought and fancy, and abstracts them from the world of action to that of contemplation. The objects of dramatic poetry affect us by sympathy, by their nearness to ourselves, as they take us by surprise, or force us upon action, "while rage with rage doth sympathise:" the objects of epic poetry affect us through the medium of the imagination, by magnitude and distance, by their permanence and universality. The one fills us with terror and pity, the other with admiration and delight. There are certain objects that strike the imagination, and inspire awe in the very idea of them, independently of any dramatic interest, that is, of any connection with the vicissitudes of human life. For instance, we cannot think of the pyramids of Egypt, of a Gothic ruin, or an old Roman encampment, without a certain emotion, a sense of power and sublimity coming over the mind. The heavenly bodies that hang over our heads wherever we go, and "in their untroubled element shall shine when we are laid in dust, and all our cares forgotten," affect us in the same way. Thus Satan's address to the Sun has an epic, not a dramatic interest; for though the second person in the dialogue makes no answer and feels no concern, yet the eye of that vast luminary is upon him, like the eye of Heaven, and seems conscious of what he says, like an universal presence. Dramatic poetry and epic in their perfection, indeed, approximate to and strengthen one another. Dramatic poetry borrows aid from the dignity of persons and things, as the heroic does from human passion; but in theory they are distinct. When Richard II. calls for the looking-glass to contemplate his faded majesty in it, and bursts into that affecting exclamation: "O that I were a

mockery-king of snow, standing before the sun of Bolingbroke!" we have here the utmost force of human passion, combined with the ideas of regal splendour and fallen power. When Milton says of Satan—

> "——— His form had not yet lost
> All her original brightness, nor appear'd
> Less than archangel ruin'd, and th' excess
> Of glory obscur'd"—

the mixture of beauty, of grandeur, and pathos, from the sense of irreparable loss, of never-ending, unavailing regret, is perfect.

The great fault of a modern school of poetry* is, that it is an experiment to reduce poetry to a mere effusion of natural sensibility; or, what is worse, to divest it both of imaginary splendour and human passion, to surround the meanest objects with the morbid feelings and devouring egotism of the writers' own minds. Milton and Shakspeare did not so understand poetry. They gave a more liberal interpretation both to nature and art. They did not do all they could to get rid of the one and the other, to fill up the dreary void with the Moods of their own Minds. They owe their power over the human mind to their having had a deeper sense than others of what was grand in the objects of nature, or affecting in the events of human life. But to the men I speak of there is nothing interesting, nothing heroical, but themselves. To them the fall of gods or of great men is the same. They do not enter into the feeling. They cannot understand the terms. They are even debarred from the last poor, paltry consolation of an unmanly triumph over fallen greatness; for their minds reject, with a convulsive effort and intolerable loathing, the very idea that there ever was, or was thought to be, anything superior to themselves. All that has ever excited the attention or admiration of the world, they look upon with the most perfect indifference; and they are surprised to find

* The school of Wordsworth and the Lake poets.—Ed. The writer had also, perhaps, an eye to Crabbe.

that the world repays their indifference with scorn. "With what measure they mete, it has been meted to them again."

Shakspeare's imagination is of the same plastic kind as his conception of character or passion. "It glances from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven." Its movement is rapid and devious. It unites the most opposite extremes; or, as Puck says, in boasting of his own feats, "puts a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes." He seems always hurrying from his subject, even while describing it; but the stroke, like the lightning's, is sure as it is sudden. He takes the widest possible range, but from that very range he has his choice of the greatest variety and aptitude of materials. He brings together images the most alike, but placed at the greatest distance from each other; that is, found in circumstances of the greatest dissimilitude. From the remoteness of his combinations, and the celerity with which they are effected, they coalesce the more indissolubly together. The more the thoughts are strangers to each other, and the longer they have been kept asunder, the more intimate does their union seem to become. Their felicity is equal to their force. Their likeness is made more dazzling by their novelty. They startle, and take the fancy prisoner in the same instant. I will mention one or two which are very striking, and not much known, out of Troilus and Cressida. Æneas says to Agamemnon:

> "I ask that I might waken reverence,
> And bid the cheek be ready with a blush
> Modest as morning, when she coldly eyes
> The youthful Phœbus."

Ulysses urging Achilles to shew himself in the field, says:

> "No man is the lord of any thing . . . .
> Till he communicate his parts to others:
> Nor doth he of himself know them for aught,
> Till he behold them formed in the applause

> Where they're extended! who, like an arch, reverberates
> The voice again; or, like a gate of steel,
> Fronting the sun, receives and renders back
> His figure and his heat."

Patroclus gives the indolent warrior the same advice:

> "Sweet, rouse yourself; and the weak wanton Cupid
> Shall from your neck unloose his amorous fold,
> And, like a dew-drop from the lion's mane,
> Be shook to air."

Shakspeare's language and versification are like the rest of him. He has a magic power over words; they come winged at his bidding, and seem to know their places. They are struck out at a heat on the spur of the occasion, and have all the truth and vividness which arise from an actual impression of the objects. His epithets and single phrases are like sparkles, thrown off from an imagination fired by the whirling rapidity of its own motion. His language is hieroglyphical. It translates thoughts into visible images. It abounds in sudden transitions and elliptical expressions. This is the source of his mixed metaphors, which are only abbreviated forms of speech. These, however, give no pain from long custom. They have, in fact, become idioms in the language. They are the building, and not the scaffolding to thought. We take the meaning and effect of a well-known passage entire, and no more stop to scan and spell out the particular words and phrases than the syllables of which they are composed. In trying to recollect any other author, one sometimes stumbles, in case of failure, on a word as good. In Shakspeare, any other word but the true one is sure to be wrong. If anybody, for instance, could not recollect the words of the following description,

> " —— Light thickens, and the crow
> Makes wing to the rooky wood,"

he would be greatly at a loss to substitute others for them equally expressive of the feeling. These remarks, however,

are strictly applicable only to the impassioned parts of Shakspeare's language, which flowed from the warmth and originality of his imagination, and were his own. The language used for prose conversation and ordinary business is sometimes technical, and involved in the affectation of the time. Compare, for example, Othello's Apology to the Senate, relating "his whole course of love," with some of the preceding parts relating to his appointment and the official dispatches from Cyprus. In this respect, "the business of the state does him offence." His versification is no less powerful, sweet, and varied. It has every occasional excellence, of sullen intricacy crabbed and perplexed, or of the smoothest and loftiest expansion—from the ease and familiarity of measured conversation to the lyrical sounds

> "——— Of ditties highly penned,
> Sung by a fair queen in a summer's bower,
> With ravishing division to her lute."

It is the only blank verse in the language except Milton's that for itself is readable. It is not stately and uniformly swelling like his, but varied and broken by the inequalities of the ground it has to pass over in its uncertain course:

> "And so by many winding nooks it strays,
> With willing sport to the wild ocean."

It remains to speak of the faults of Shakspeare. They are not so many or so great as they have been represented; what there are, are chiefly owing to the following causes: The universality of his genius was, perhaps, a disadvantage to his single works, the variety of his resources, sometimes diverting him from applying them to the most effectual purposes. He might be said to combine the powers of Æschylus and Aristophanes, of Dante and Rabelais, in his own mind. If he had been only half what he was, he would perhaps have appeared greater. The natural ease and indifference of his temper made him sometimes less scrupulous than he might have been. He

is relaxed and careless in critical places; he is in earnest throughout only in Timon, Macbeth, and Lear. Again, he had no models of acknowledged excellence constantly in view to stimulate his efforts, and, by all that appears, no love of fame. He wrote for the "great vulgar and the small" in his time, not for posterity. If Queen Elizabeth and the maids of honour laughed heartily at his worst jokes, and the catcalls in the gallery were silent at his best passages, he went home satisfied, and slept the next night well. He did not trouble himself about Voltaire's criticisms. He was willing to take advantage of the ignorance of the age in many things, and if his plays pleased others, not to quarrel with them himself. His very facility of production would make him set less value on his own excellences, and not care to distinguish nicely between what he did well or ill. His blunders in chronology and geography do not amount to above half a dozen, and they are offences against chronology and geography,* not against poetry. As to the unities, he was right in setting them at defiance. He was fonder of puns than became so great a man. His barbarisms were those of his age. His genius was his own. He had no objection to float down with the stream of common taste and opinion: he rose above it by his own buoyancy, and an impulse which he could not keep under, in spite of himself or others, and "his delights did show most dolphin-like."

He had an equal genius for comedy and tragedy; and his tragedies are better than his comedies, because tragedy is better than comedy. His female characters, which have been found fault with as insipid, are the finest in the world. Lastly, Shakspeare was the least of a coxcomb of any one that ever lived, and much of a gentleman.

Shakspeare discovers in his writings little religious enthusiasm, and an indifference to personal reputation;

* But some of these supposed blunders have been shown, of late years, to be no blunders at all.—Ed.

he had none of the bigotry of his age; and his political prejudices were not very strong. In these respects, as well as in every other, he formed a direct contrast to Milton. Milton's works are a perpetual invocation to the Muses, a hymn to Fame. He had his thoughts constantly fixed on the contemplation of the Hebrew theocracy, and of a perfect commonwealth; and he seized the pen with a hand just warm from the touch of the ark of faith. His religious zeal infused its character into his imagination; so that he devotes himself with the same sense of duty to the cultivation of his genius, as he did to the exercise of virtue or the good of his country. The spirit of the poet, the patriot, and the prophet vied with each other in his breast. His mind appears to have held equal communion with the inspired writers, and with the bards and sages of ancient Greece and Rome:

> "Blind Thamyris, and blind Mæonides,
> And Tiresias, and Phineus, prophets old."

He had a high standard with which he was always comparing himself, nothing short of which could satisfy his jealous ambition. He thought of nobler forms and nobler things than those he found about him. He lived apart in the solitude of his own thoughts, carefully excluding from his mind whatever might distract its purposes, or alloy its purity, or damp its zeal. "With darkness and with dangers compassed round," he had the mighty models of antiquity always present to his thoughts, and determined to raise a monument of equal height and glory, "piling up every stone of lustre from the brook," for the delights and wonder of posterity. He had girded himself up, and, as it were, sanctified his genius to this service from his youth. "For after," he says, "I had from my first years, by the ceaseless diligence and care of my father, been exercised to the tongues, and some sciences as my age could suffer, by sundry masters and teachers, it was found that

whether aught was imposed upon me by them, or betaken to of my own choice, the style, by certain vital signs it had, was likely to live; but much latelier, in the private academies of Italy, perceiving that some trifles which I had in memory, composed at under twenty or thereabout, met with acceptance above what was looked for, I began thus far to assent both to them and divers of my friends here at home, and not less to an inward prompting which now grew daily upon me, that by labour and intense study (which I take to be my portion in this life), joined with the strong propensity of nature, I might perhaps leave something so written to after-times as they should not willingly let it die. The accomplishment of these intentions, which have lived within me ever since I could conceive myself any thing worth to my country, lies not but in a power above man's to promise; but that none hath by more studious ways endeavoured, and with more unwearied spirit that none shall, that I dare almost aver of myself, as far as life and free leisure will extend. Neither do I think it shame to covenant with any knowing reader, that for some few years yet, I may go on trust with him toward the payment of what I am now indebted, as being a work not to be raised from the heat of youth or the vapours of wine: like that which flows at waste from the pen of some vulgar amourist, or the trencher fury of a rhyming parasite, nor to be obtained by the invocation of Dame Memory and her Siren daughters, but by devout prayer to that eternal Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out His Seraphim with the hallowed fire of His altar, to touch and purify the lips of whom He pleases: to this must be added industrious and select reading, steady observation, and insight into all seemly and generous arts and affairs. Although it nothing content me to have disclosed thus much beforehand; but that I trust hereby to make it manifest with what small willingness I endure to interrupt the pursuit of no less hopes

than these, and leave a calm and pleasing solitariness, fed with cheerful and confident thoughts, to embark in a troubled sea of noises and hoarse disputes, from beholding the bright countenance of truth in the quiet and still air of delightful studies."

So that of Spenser:

> "The noble heart that harbours virtuous thought,
> And is with child of glorious great intent,
> Can never rest until it forth have brought
> The eternal brood of glory excellent."

Milton, therefore, did not write from casual impulse, but after a severe examination of his own strength, and with a resolution to leave nothing undone which it was in his power to do. He always labours, and almost always succeeds. He strives hard to say the finest things in the world, and he does say them. He adorns and dignifies his subject to the utmost: he surrounds it with every possible association of beauty or grandeur, whether moral, intellectual, or physical. He refines on his descriptions of beauty, loading sweets on sweets, till the sense aches at them, and raises his images of terror to a gigantic elevation, that "makes Ossa like a wart." In Milton, there is always an appearance of effort: in Shakspeare, scarcely any.

Milton has borrowed more than any other writer, and exhausted every source of imitation, sacred or profane; yet he is perfectly distinct from every other writer. He is a writer of centos, and yet in originality scarcely inferior to Homer. The power of his mind is stamped on every line. The fervour of his imagination melts down and renders malleable, as in a furnace, the most contradictory materials. In reading his works, we feel ourselves under the influence of a mighty intellect that, the nearer it approaches to others, becomes more distinct from them. The quantity of art in him shows the strength of his genius: the weight of his intellectual obligations would have

oppressed any other writer. Milton's learning has the effect of intuition. He describes objects, of which he could only have read in books, with the vividness of actual observation. His imagination has the force of nature. He makes words tell as pictures:

> "Him followeth Rimmon, whose delightful seat
> Was fair Damascus, on the fertile banks
> Of Abbana and Pharphar, lucid streams."

The word *lucid* here gives to the idea all the sparkling effect of the most perfect landscape.

And again:

> "As when a vulture on Imaus bred,
> Whose snowy ridge the roving Tartar bounds,
> Dislodging from a region scarce of prey,
> To gorge the flesh of lambs and yeanling kids
> On hills where flocks are fed, flies towards the springs
> Of Ganges or Hydaspes, Indian streams;
> But in his way lights on the barren plains
> Of Sericana, where Chineses drive
> With sails and wind their cany waggons light."

If Milton had taken a journey for the express purpose, he could not have described this scenery and mode of life better. Such passages are like demonstrations of natural history. Instances might be multiplied without end.

We might be tempted to suppose that the vividness, with which he describes visible objects, was owing to their having acquired an unusual degree of strength in his mind after the privation of his sight; but we find the same palpableness and truth in the descriptions which occur in his early poems. In *Lycidas*, he speaks of "the great vision of the guarded mount," with that preternatural weight of impression with which it would present itself suddenly to "the pilot of some small night-foundered skiff:" and the lines in the *Penseroso*, describing "the wandering moon:"

> "Riding near her highest noon,
> Like one that hath been led astray
> Through the heaven's wide pathless way":

are as if he had gazed himself blind in looking at her. There is also the same depth of impression in his descriptions of the objects of all the different senses, whether colours, or sounds, or smells—the same absorption of his mind in whatever engaged his attention at the time. It has been indeed objected to Milton by a common perversity of criticism, that his ideas were musical rather than picturesque, as if, because they were in the highest degree musical, they must be (to keep the sage critical balance even, and to allow no one man to possess two qualities at the same time) proportionably deficient in other respects. But Milton's poetry is not cast in any such narrow, commonplace mould: it is not so barren of resources: his worship of the Muse was not so simple or confined. A sound arises "like a steam of rich distilled perfumes;" we hear the pealing organ; but the incense on the altars is also there, and the statues of the gods are ranged around! The ear indeed predominates over the eye, because it is more immediately affected, and because the language of music blends more immediately with, and forms a more natural accompaniment to, the variable and indefinite associations of ideas conveyed by words. But where the associations of the imagination are not the principal thing, the individual object is given by Milton with equal force and beauty. The strongest and best proof of this, as a characteristic power of his mind, is that the persons of Adam and Eve, of Satan, &c., are always accompanied, in our imagination, with the grandeur of the naked figure: they convey to us the ideas of sculpture. As an instance, take the following:

"———— He soon
Saw within ken a glorious Angel stand,
The same whom John saw also in the sun:
His back was turned, but not his brightness hid;
Of beaming sunny rays a golden tiar
Circled his head, nor less his locks behind
Illustrious on his shoulders fledge with wings

Lay waving round; on some great charge employ'd
He seem'd, or fix'd in cogitation deep.
Glad was the Spirit Impure, as now in hope
To find who might direct his wand'ring flight
To Paradise, the happy seat of man,
His journey's end, and our beginning woe.
But first he casts to change his proper shape,
Which else might work him danger or delay:
And now a stripling cherub he appears,
Not of the prime, yet such as in his face
Youth smiled celestial, and to every limb
Suitable grace diffus'd, so well he feign'd:
Under a coronet his flowing hair
In curls on either cheek play'd; wings he wore
Of many a colour'd plume sprinkled with gold,
His habit fit for speed succinct, and held
Before his decent steps a silver wand."

The figures introduced here have all the elegance and precision of a Greek statue; glossy and impurpled, tinged with golden light, and musical as the strings of Memnon's harp!

Again, nothing can be more magnificent than the portrait of Beelzebub:

"With Atlantean shoulders fit to bear
The weight of mightiest monarchies:"

Or the comparison of Satan, as he "lay floating many a rood," to "that sea beast,"

"Leviathan, which God of all his works
Created hugest that swim the ocean-stream!"

What a force of imagination is there in this last expression! What an idea it conveys of the size of that hugest of created beings, as if it shrunk up the ocean to a stream, and took up the sea in its nostrils as a very little thing! Force of style is one of Milton's greatest excellences. Hence, perhaps, he stimulates us more in the reading, and less afterwards. The way to defend Milton against all impugners is to take down the book and read it.

Milton's blank verse is the only blank verse in the language (except Shakspeare's) that deserves the name of verse. Dr. Johnson, who had modelled his ideas of versification on the regular sing-song of Pope, condemns the "Paradise Lost" as harsh and unequal. I shall not pretend to say that this is not sometimes the case; for where a degree of excellence beyond the mechanical rules of art is attempted, the poet must sometimes fail. But I imagine that there are more perfect examples in Milton of musical expression, or of an adaptation of the sound and movement of the verse to the meaning of the passage, than in all our other writers, whether of rhyme or blank verse, put together (with the exception already mentioned). Spenser is the most harmonious of our stanza writers, as Dryden is the most sounding and varied of our rhymists. But in neither is there anything like the same ear for music, the same power of approximating the varieties of poetical to those of musical rhythm, as there is in our great epic poet. The sound of his lines is moulded into the expression of the sentiment, almost of the very image. They rise or fall, pause or hurry rapidly on, with exquisite art, but without the least trick or affectation, as the occasion seems to require.

The following are some of the finest instances:

"——— His hand was known
In Heaven by many a tower'd structure high;—
Nor was his name unheard or unador'd
In ancient Greece: and in the Ausonian land
Men called him Mulciber: and how he fell
From Heaven, they fabled, thrown by angry Jove
Sheer o'er the chrystal battlements; from morn
To noon he fell, from noon to dewy eve,
A summer's day; and with the setting sun
Dropt from the zenith like a falling star
On Lemnos, the Ægean isle: thus they relate,
Erring."

"——— But chief the spacious hall
Thick swarm'd, both on the ground and in the air,
Brush'd with the hiss of rustling wings. As bees
In spring time, when the sun with Taurus rides,
Pour forth their populous youth about the hive
In clusters; they among fresh dews and flow'rs
Fly to and fro: or on the smoothed plank,
The suburb of their straw-built citadel,
New rubb'd with balm, expatiate and confer
Their state affairs. So thick the airy crowd
Swarm'd and were straiten'd; till the signal giv'n,
Behold a wonder! They but now who seem'd
In bigness to surpass earth's giant sons,
Now less than smallest dwarfs, in narrow room
Throng numberless, like that Pygmean race
Beyond the Indian mount, or fairy elves,
Whose midnight revels by a forest side
Or fountain, some belated peasant sees,
Or dreams he sees, while over-head the moon
Sits arbitress, and nearer to the earth
Wheels her pale course: they on their mirth and dance
Intent, with jocund music charm his ear;
At once with joy and fear his heart rebounds."

I can only give another instance, though I have some difficulty in leaving off:

"Round he surveys (and well might, where he stood
So high above the circling canopy
Of night's extended shade) from th' eastern point
Of Libra to the fleecy star that bears
Andromeda far off Atlantic seas
Beyond the horizon: then from pole to pole
He views in breadth, and without longer pause
Down right into the world's first region throws
His flight precipitant, and winds with ease
Through the pure marble air his oblique way
Amongst innumerable stars that shone:
Stars distant, but nigh hand seem'd other worlds;
Or other worlds they seem'd or happy isles," &c.

The verse, in this exquisitely modulated passage, floats up and down as if it had itself wings. Milton has himself given us the theory of his versification:

"Such as the meeting soul may pierce
In notes with many a winding bout
Of linked sweetness long drawn out."

Dr. Johnson and Pope would have converted his vaulting Pegasus into a rocking-horse. Read any other blank verse but Milton's, — Thomson's, Young's, Cowper's, Wordsworth's,—and it will be found, from the want of the same insight into "the hidden soul of harmony," to be mere lumbering prose.

To proceed to a consideration of the merits of "Paradise Lost," in the most essential point of view, I mean as to the poetry of character and passion. I shall say nothing of the fable, or of other technical objections or excellences; but I shall try to explain at once the foundation of the interest belonging to the poem. I am ready to give up the dialogues in Heaven where, as Pope justly observes, "God the Father turns a school divine;" nor do I consider the battle of the angels as the climax of sublimity, or the most successful effort of Milton's pen. In a word, the interest of the poem arises from the daring ambition and fierce passions of Satan, and from the account of the paradisaical happiness, and the loss of it by our first parents. Three-fourths of the work are taken up with these characters, and nearly all that relates to them is unmixed sublimity and beauty. The two first books alone are like two massy pillars of solid gold.

Satan is the most heroic subject that ever was chosen for a poem; and the execution is as perfect as the design is lofty. He was the first of created beings who, for endeavouring to be equal with the highest, and to divide the empire of heaven with the Almighty, was hurled down to hell. His aim was no less than the throne of the universe; his means, myriads of angelic armies bright, the third part of the heavens, whom he lured after him with his countenance, and who durst defy the Omnipotent in arms. His ambition was the greatest, and his punish-

ment was the greatest; but not so his despair: for his fortitude was as great as his sufferings. His strength of mind was matchless as his strength of body; the vastness of his designs did not surpass the firm, inflexible determination with which he submitted to his irreversible doom and final loss of all good. His power of action and of suffering was equal. He was the greatest power that was ever overthrown, with the strongest will left to resist or to endure. He was baffled, not confounded. He stood like a tower; or

> "——————— As when heaven's fire
> Hath scathed the forest oaks or mountain pines."

He was still surrounded with hosts of rebel angels, armed warriors, who own him as their sovereign leader, and with whose fate he sympathises as he views them round, far as the eye can reach; though he keeps aloof from them in his own mind, and holds supreme counsel only with his own breast. An outcast from Heaven, hell trembles beneath his feet, Sin and Death are at his heels, and mankind are his easy prey:

> "All is not lost; th' unconquerable will,
> And study of revenge, immortal hate,
> And courage never to submit or yield,
> And what else is not to be overcome,"

are still his. The sense of his punishment seems lost in the magnitude of it; the fierceness of tormenting flames is qualified and made innoxious by the greater fierceness of his pride; the loss of infinite happiness to himself is compensated in thought by the power of inflicting infinite misery on others. Yet Satan is not the principle of malignity, or of the abstract love of evil, but of the abstract love of power, of pride, of self-will personified, to which last principle all other good and evil, and even his own, are subordinate. From this principle he never once flinches. His love of power and contempt for suffering are never once relaxed from the highest pitch

of intensity. His thoughts burn like a hell within him; but the power of thought holds dominion in his mind over every other consideration. The consciousness of a determined purpose, of "that intellectual being, those thoughts that wander through eternity, though accompanied with endless pain, he prefers to nonentity, to "being swallowed up and lost in the wide womb of uncreated night." He expresses the sum and substance of all ambition in one line: "Fallen cherub, to be weak is miserable, doing or suffering!" After such a conflict as his and such a defeat, to retreat in order, to rally, to make terms, to exist at all, is something; but he does more than this: he founds a new empire in hell, and from it conquers this new world, whither he bends his undaunted flight, forcing his way through nether and surrounding fires. The poet has not in all this given us a mere shadowy outline; the strength is equal to the magnitude of the conception. The Achilles of Homer is not more distinct; the Titans were not more vast; Prometheus chained to his rock was not a more terrific example of suffering and of crime. Wherever the figure of Satan is introduced, whether he walks or flies, "rising aloft incumbent on the dusky air," it is illustrated with the most striking and appropriate images: so that we see it always before us, gigantic, irregular, portentous, uneasy, and disturbed: but dazzling in its faded splendour, the clouded ruins of a god. The deformity of Satan is only in the depravity of his will; he has no bodily deformity to excite our loathing or disgust. The horns and tail are not there, poor emblems of the unbending, unconquered spirit, of the writhing agonies within. Milton was too magnanimous and open an antagonist to support his argument by the by-tricks of a hump and cloven foot, to bring into the fair field of controversy the good old catholic prejudices of which Tasso and Dante have availed themselves, and which the mystic German critics would restore. He relied on the justice of his cause, and did not scruple

to give the devil his due. Some persons may think that he has carried his liberality too far, and injured the cause he professed to espouse by making him the chief person in his poem. Considering the nature of his subject, he would be equally in danger of running into this fault, from his faith in religion and his love of rebellion; and perhaps each of these motives had its full share in determining the choice of his subject.

Not only the figure of Satan, but his speeches in council, his soliloquies, his address to Eve, his share in the war in heaven, or in the fall of man, shew the same decided superiority of character. To give only one instance, almost the first speech he makes:

"Is this the region, this the soil, the clime,
Said then the lost archangel, this the seat
That we must change for Heaven; this mournful gloom
For that celestial light? Be it so, since he
Who now is sov'rain can dispose and bid
What shall be right: farthest from him is best,
Whom reason hath equall'd, force hath made supreme
Above his equals. Farewell happy fields,
Where joy for ever dwells: Hail horrors, hail
Infernal world, and thou profoundest Hell,
Receive thy new possessor; one who brings
A mind not to be chang'd by place or time.
The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.
What matter where, if I be still the same,
And what I should be, all but less than he
Whom thunder hath made greater? Here at least
We shall be free; th' Almighty hath not built
Here for his envy, will not drive us hence:
Here we may reign secure, and in my choice
To reign is worth ambition, though in Hell:
Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven."

The whole of the speeches and debates in Pandemonium are well worthy of the place and the occasion—with gods for speakers, and angels and archangels for hearers. There is a decided manly tone in the arguments and sentiments, an eloquent dogmatism, as if each person

spoke from thorough conviction; an excellence which Milton probably borrowed from his spirit of partisanship or else his spirit of partisanship from the natural firmness and vigour of his mind. In this respect Milton resembles Dante (the only modern writer with whom he has anything in common), and it is remarkable that Dante, as well as Milton, was a political partisan. That approximation to the severity of impassioned prose which has been made an objection to Milton's poetry, and which is chiefly to be met with in these bitter invectives, is one of its great excellences. The author might here turn his philippics against Salmasius to good account. The rout in heaven is like the fall of some mighty structure, nodding to its base "with hideous ruin and combustion down." But, perhaps, of all the passages in "Paradise Lost," the description of the employments of the angels during the absence of Satan, some of whom "retreated in a silent valley, sing with notes angelical to many a harp their own heroic deeds and hapless fall by doom of battle," is the most perfect example of mingled pathos and sublimity. What proves the truth of this noble picture in every part, and that the frequent complaint of want of interest in it is the fault of the reader, not of the poet, is that when any interest of a practical kind takes a shape that can be at all turned into this (and there is little doubt that Milton had some such in his eye in writing it), each party converts it to its own purposes, feels the absolute identity of these abstracted and high speculations, and that, in fact, a noted political writer of the present day has exhausted nearly the whole account of Satan in the "Paradise Lost," by applying it to a character * whom he considered as after the devil (though I do not know whether he would make even that exception), the greatest enemy of the human race. This may serve to show that Milton's Satan is not a very insipid personage.

* The First Napoleon.—Ed.

Of Adam and Eve it has been said, that the ordinary reader can feel little interest in them, because they have none of the passions, pursuits, or even relations of human life, except that of man and wife, the least interesting of all others, if not to the parties concerned, at least to the bystanders. The preference has on this account been given to Homer, who, it is said, has left very vivid and infinitely diversified pictures of all the passions and affections, public and private, incident to human nature—the relations of son, of brother, parent, friend, citizen, and many others. Longinus preferred the Iliad to the Odyssey, on account of the greater number of battles it contains; but I can neither agree to his criticism, nor assent to the present objection. It is true, there is little action in this part of Milton's poem; but there is much repose and more enjoyment. There are none of the every-day occurrences, contentions, disputes, wars, fightings, feuds, jealousies, trades, professions, liveries, and common handicrafts of life; "no kind of traffic; letters are not known; no use of service, of riches, poverty, contract, succession, bourne, bound of land, tilth, vineyard none; no occupation, no treason, felony, sword, pike, knife, gun, nor need of any engine." So much the better; thank Heaven, all these were yet to come. But still the die was cast, and in them our doom was sealed. In them

> "The generations were prepared; the pangs,
> The internal pangs, were ready, the dread strife
> Of poor humanity's afflicted will,
> Struggling in vain with ruthless destiny."

In their first false step we trace "all our future woe, with loss of Eden." But there was a short and precious interval between, like the first blush of morning before the day is overcast with tempest, the dawn of the world, the birth of nature from "the unapparent deep," with its first dews and freshness on its cheek, breathing odours. Theirs was the first delicious taste of life, and on them depended all that

was to come of it. In them hung trembling all our hopes and fears. They were as yet alone in the world, in the eye of nature, wondering at their new being, full of enjoyment and enraptured with one another, with the voice of their Maker walking in the garden, and ministering angels attendant on their steps, winged messengers from heaven like rosy clouds descending in their sight. Nature played around them her virgin fancies wild, and spread for them a repast where no crude surfeit reigned. Was there nothing in this scene, which God and nature alone witnessed, to interest a modern critic? What need was there of action, where the heart was full of bliss and innocence without it? They had nothing to do but feel their own happiness, and "know to know no more." "They toiled not, neither did they spin; yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." All things seem to acquire fresh sweetness, and to be clothed with fresh beauty in their sight. They tasted as it were for themselves and us, of all that there ever was pure in human bliss. "In them the burthen of the mystery, the heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world, is lightened." They stood awhile perfect; but they afterwards fell, and were driven out of Paradise, tasting the first fruits of bitterness as they had done of bliss. But their pangs were such as a pure spirit might feel at the sight, their tears "such as angels weep." The pathos is of that mild contemplative kind which arises from regret for the loss of unspeakable happiness, and resignation to inevitable fate. There is none of the fierceness of intemperate passion, none of the agony of mind and turbulence of action, which is the result of the habitual struggles of the will with circumstances, irritated by repeated disappointment, and constantly setting its desires most eagerly on that which there is an impossibility of attaining. This would have destroyed the beauty of the whole picture. They had received their unlooked-for happiness as a free gift from

their Creator's hands, and they submitted to its loss, not without sorrow, but without impious and stubborn repining:

> "In either hand the hast'ning angel caught
> Our ling'ring parents, and to th' eastern gate
> Led them direct, and down the cliff as fast
> To the subjected plain; then disappear'd.
> They looking back, all th' eastern side beheld
> Of Paradise, so late their happy seat,
> Wav'd over by that flaming brand, the gate
> With dreadful faces throng'd, and fiery arms:
> Some natural tears they dropt, but wip'd them soon;
> The world was all before them, where to choose
> Their place of rest, and Providence their guide."

LECTURE IV.

ON DRYDEN AND POPE.

Dryden and Pope are the great masters of the artificial style of poetry in our language, as the poets of whom I have already treated, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakspeare, and Milton, were of the natural; and though this artificial style is generally and very justly acknowledged to be inferior to the other, yet those who stand at the head of that class ought, perhaps, to rank higher than those who occupy an inferior place in a superior class. They have a clear and independent claim upon our gratitude, as having produced a kind and degree of excellence which existed equally nowhere else. What has been done well by some later writers of the highest style of poetry, is included in and obscured by a greater degree of power and genius in those before them: what has been done best by poets of an entirely distinct turn of mind stands by itself, and tells for its whole amount. Young, for instance, Gray, or Akenside, only follow in the train of Milton and Shakspeare: Pope and Dryden walk by their side, though of an unequal stature, and are entitled to a first place in the lists of fame. This seems to be not only the reason of the thing, but the common sense of mankind, who, without any regular process of reflection, judge of the merit of a work, not more by its inherent and absolute worth than by its originality and capacity of gratifying a different faculty of the mind or a different class of readers; for it should be recollected that there may be readers (as well as poets) not of the highest class, though very good sort of people, and not altogether to be despised.

The question, whether Pope was a poet,* has hardly yet been settled, and is hardly worth settling; for if he was not a great poet, he must have been a great prose-writer; that is, he was a great writer of some sort. He was a man of exquisite faculties, and of the most refined taste; and as he chose verse (the most obvious distinction of poetry) as the vehicle to express his ideas, he has generally passed for a poet, and a good one. If indeed by a great poet we mean one who gives the utmost grandeur to our conceptions of nature, or the utmost force to the passions of the heart, Pope was not in this sense a great poet; for the bent, the characteristic power of his mind, lay the clean contrary way: namely, in representing things as they appear to the indifferent observer, stripped of prejudice and passion, as in his Critical Essays; or in representing them in the most contemptible and insignificant point of view, as in his Satires; or in clothing the little with mock-dignity, as in his poems of Fancy; or in adorning the trivial incidents and familiar relations of life with the utmost elegance of expression and all the flattering illusions of friendship or self-love, as in his Epistles. He was not, then, distinguished as a poet of lofty enthusiasm, of strong imagination, with a passionate sense of the beauties of nature, or a deep insight into the workings of the heart; but he was a wit and a critic, a man of sense, of observation, and the world, with a keen relish for the elegances of art, or of nature when embellished by art, a quick tact for propriety of thought and manners as established by the forms and customs of society, a refined sympathy with the sentiments and habitudes of human life, as he felt them within the little circle of his family and friends. He was, in a word, the poet, not of nature, but of art; and the distinction between the two, as well as I can make it out, is this. The poet of nature is one who, from the elements of beauty, of power, and of passion in his

* See the *Scots' Magazine* for Feb. 1818.—Ed.

own breast, sympathises with whatever is beautiful, and grand, and impassioned in nature, in its simple majesty, in its immediate appeal to the senses, to the thoughts and hearts of all men; so that the poet of nature, by the truth, and depth, and harmony of his mind, may be said to hold communion with the very soul of nature; to be identified with, and to foreknow, and to record the feelings of all men at all times and places, as they are liable to the same impressions, and to exert the same power over the minds of his readers that nature does. He sees things in their eternal beauty, for he sees them as they are; he feels them in their universal interest, for he feels them as they affect the first principles of his and our common nature. Such was Homer, such was Shakspeare, whose works will last as long as nature, because they are a copy of the indestructible forms and everlasting impulses of nature, welling out from the bosom as from a perennial spring, or stamped upon the senses by the hand of their Maker. The power of the imagination in them is the representative power of all nature. It has its centre in the human soul, and makes the circuit of the universe.

Pope was not assuredly a poet of this class, or in the first rank of it. He saw nature only dressed by art; he judged of beauty by fashion; he sought for truth in the opinions of the world; he judged of the feelings of others by his own. The capacious soul of Shakspeare had an intuitive and mighty sympathy with whatever could enter into the heart of man in all possible circumstances: Pope had an exact knowledge of all that he himself loved or hated, wished or wanted. Milton has winged his daring flight from heaven to earth, through Chaos and old Night. Pope's Muse never wandered with safety but from his library to his grotto, or from his grotto into his library back again. His mind dwelt with greater pleasure on his own garden than on the garden of Eden; he could describe the faultless whole-length mirror that reflected his own

person better than the smooth surface of the lake that reflects the face of heaven, a piece of cut glass or a pair of paste buckles with more brilliance and effect than a thousand dew-drops glittering in the sun. He would be more delighted with a patent lamp than with "the pale reflex of Cynthia's brow," that fills the skies with its soft silent lustre, that trembles through the cottage window, and cheers the watchful mariner on the lonely wave. In short, he was the poet of personality and of polished life. That which was nearest to him, was the greatest: the fashion of the day bore sway in his mind over the immutable laws of nature. He preferred the artificial to the natural in external objects, because he had a stronger fellow-feeling with the self-love of the maker or proprietor of a gewgaw than admiration of that which was interesting to all mankind. He preferred the artificial to the natural in passion, because the involuntary and uncalculating impulses of the one hurried him away with a force and vehemence with which he could not grapple; while he could trifle with the conventional and superficial modifications of mere sentiment at will, laugh at or admire, put them on or off like a masquerade dress, make much or little of them, indulge them for a longer or a shorter time, as he pleased; and because, while they amused his fancy and exercised his ingenuity, they never once disturbed his vanity, his levity or indifference. His mind was the antithesis of strength and grandeur; its power was the power of indifference. He had none of the enthusiasm of poetry; he was in poetry what the sceptic is in religion.

It cannot be denied, that his chief excellence lay more in diminishing than in aggrandising objects: in checking, not in encouraging our enthusiasm: in sneering at the extravagances of fancy or passion, instead of giving a loose to them: in describing a row of pins and needles rather than the embattled spears of Greeks and Trojans: in penning a lampoon or a compliment, and in praising Martha Blount.

Shakspeare says;

"——— In her [fortune's] ray and brightness
The herd hath more annoyance by the breese
Than by the tiger: but when the splitting wind
Makes flexible the knees of knotted oaks,
And flies fled under shed, why then the thing of courage,
As roused with rage, with rage doth sympathise;
And with an accent tuned in self-same key,
Retorts to chiding Fortune." *

There is none of this rough work in Pope. His Muse was on a peace-establishment, and grew somewhat effeminate by long ease and indulgence. He lived in the smiles of fortune, and basked in the favour of the great. In his smooth and polished verse we meet with no prodigies of nature, but with miracles of wit; the thunders of his pen are whispered flatteries: its forked lightnings, pointed sarcasms; for "the gnarled oak" he gives us "the soft myrtle:" for rocks, and seas, and mountains, artificial grass-plats, gravel-walks, and tinkling rills: for earthquakes and tempests, the breaking of a flower-pot or the fall of a china-jar: for the tug and war of the elements or the deadly strife of the passions we have

"Calm contemplation and poetic ease."

Yet within this retired and narrow circle how much, and that how exquisite, was contained! What discrimination, what wit, what delicacy, what fancy, what lurking spleen, what elegance of thought, what pampered refinement of sentiment! It is like looking at the world through a microscope, where everything assumes a new character and a new consequence, where things are seen in their minutest circumstances and slightest shades of difference; where the little becomes gigantic, the deformed beautiful, and the beautiful deformed. The wrong end of the magnifier is, to be sure, held to everything; but still the exhibition is highly curious, and we know not whether to

* "Troilus and Cressida," iii. 1.—Ed.

be most pleased or surprised. Such, at least, is the best account I am able to give of this extraordinary man, without doing injustice to him or others. It is time to refer to particular instances in his works. The Rape of the Lock is the best or most ingenious of these. It is the most exquisite specimen of *filigree* work ever invented. It is admirable in proportion as it is made of nothing:

> "More subtle web Arachne cannot spin,
> Nor the fine nets, which oft we woven see
> Of scorched dew, do not in th' air more lightly flee."

It is made of gauze and silver spangles. The most glittering appearance is given to everything, to paste, pomatum, billets-doux, and patches. Airs, languid airs, breathe around; the atmosphere is perfumed with affectation. A toilette is described with the solemnity of an altar raised to the Goddess of Vanity, and the history of a silver bodkin is given with all the pomp of heraldry. No pains are spared, no profusion of ornament, no splendour of poetic diction, to set off the meanest things. The balance between the concealed irony and the assumed gravity is as nicely trimmed as the balance of power in Europe. The little is made great, and the great little. You hardly know whether to laugh or weep. It is the triumph of insignificance, the apotheosis of foppery and folly. It is the perfection of the mock-heroic! I will give only the two following passages in illustration of these remarks. Can anything be more elegant and graceful than the description of Belinda, in the beginning of the second canto?

> "Not with more glories, in the ethereal plain,
> The sun first rises o'er the purpled main,
> Than, issuing forth, the rival of his beams
> Launch'd on the bosom of the silver Thames.
> Fair nymphs and well-drest youths around her shone,
> But ev'ry eye was fix'd on her alone.
> On her white breast a sparkling cross she wore,
> Which Jews might kiss, and infidels adore.

Her lively looks a sprightly mind disclose,
Quick as her eyes, and as unfix'd as those:
Favours to none, to all she smiles extends;
Oft she rejects, but never once offends.
Bright as the sun, her eyes the gazers strike;
And, like the sun, they shine on all alike.
Yet graceful ease, and sweetness void of pride,
Might hide her faults, if belles had faults to hide:
If to her share some female errors fall,
Look on her face, and you'll forget 'em all.

This nymph, to the destruction of mankind,
Nourish'd two locks, which graceful hung behind
In equal curls, and well conspir'd to deck
With shining ringlets the smooth iv'ry neck."

The following is the introduction to the account of Belinda's assault upon the baron bold, who had dissevered one of these locks "from her fair head for ever and for ever":

"Now meet thy fate, incens'd Belinda cry'd,
And drew a deadly bodkin from her side.
(The same his ancient personage to deck,
Her great, great grandsire wore about his neck,
In three seal rings; which after, melted down,
Form'd a vast buckle for his widow's gown:
Her infant grandame's whistle next it grew,
The bells she jingled, and the whistle blew;
Then in a bodkin grac'd her mother's hairs,
Which long she wore, and now Belinda wears.)"

I do not know how far Pope was indebted for the original idea, or the delightful execution of this poem, to the Lutrin of Boileau.

The Rape of the Lock is a double-refined essence of wit and fancy, as the Essay on Criticism is of wit and sense. The quantity of thought and observation in this work, for so young a man as Pope was when he wrote it, is wonderful: unless we adopt the supposition, that most men of genius spend the rest of their lives in teaching others what they themselves have learned under twenty. The conciseness and felicity of the expression are equally

remarkable. Thus in reasoning on the variety of men's opinion, he says;

> "'Tis with our judgments, as our watches; none
> Go just alike, yet each believes his own."

Nothing can be more original and happy than the general remarks and illustrations in the Essay: the critical rules laid down are too much those of a school, and of a confined one. There is one passage in the Essay on Criticism in which the author speaks with that eloquent enthusiasm of the fame of ancient writers, which those will always feel who have themselves any hope or chance of immortality. I have quoted the passage elsewhere, but I will repeat it here:

> "Still green with bays each ancient altar stands,
> Above the reach of sacrilegious hands;
> Secure from flames, from envy's fiercer rage,
> Destructive war, and all-involving age.
> Hail, bards triumphant, born in happier days,
> Immortal heirs of universal praise!
> Whose honours with increase of ages grow,
> As streams roll down, enlarging as they flow."

These lines come with double force and beauty on the reader, as they were dictated by the writer's despair of ever attaining that lasting glory which he celebrates with such disinterested enthusiasm in others, from the lateness of the age in which he lived, and from his writing in a tongue, not understood by other nations, and that grows obsolete and unintelligible to ourselves at the end of every second century. But he needed not have thus antedated his own poetical doom—the loss and entire oblivion of that which can never die. If he had known, he might have boasted that "his little bark" wafted down the stream of time:

> "———— With *theirs* should sail,
> Pursue the triumph and partake the gale"—

if those who know how to set a due value on the blessing,

were not the last to decide confidently on their own pretensions to it.

There is a cant in the present day about genius as everything in poetry: there was a cant in the time of Pope about sense, as performing all sorts of wonders. It was a kind of watchword, the shibboleth of a critical party of the day. As a proof of the exclusive attention which it occupied in their minds, it is remarkable that in the Essay on Criticism (not a very long poem) there are no less than half a score of successive couplets rhyming to the word *sense*. This appears almost incredible without giving the instances, and no less so when they are given:

"But of the two, less dangerous is the offence,
To tire our patience than mislead our sense."—*lines* 3, 4.
"In search of wit these lose their common sense,
And then turn critics in their own defence."—*l.* 28, 29.
"Pride, where wit fails, steps in to our defence,
And fills up all the mighty void of sense."—*l.* 209, 10.
"Some by old words to fame have made pretence,
Ancients in phrase, mere moderns in their sense."—*l.* 324, 5.
"'Tis not enough no harshness gives offence;
The sound must seem an echo to the sense."—*l.* 364, 5.
"At every trifle scorn to take offence;
That always shows great pride, or little sense."—*l.* 386, 7.
"Be silent always, when you doubt your sense,
And speak, though sure, with seeming diffidence."—*l.* 366, 7.
"Be niggards of advice on no pretence,
For the worst avarice is that of sense."—*l.* 578, 9.
"Strain out the last dull dropping of their sense,
And rhyme with all the rage of impotence."—*l.* 608, 9.
"Horace still charms with graceful negligence,
And without method talks us into sense."—*l.* 653, 4.

I have mentioned this the more for the sake of those critics who are bigoted idolisers of our author, chiefly on the score of his correctness. These persons seem to be of opinion that "there is but one perfect writer, even Pope." This is, however, a mistake: his excellence is by no means faultlessness. If he had no great faults, he is full of little errors. His grammatical construction is

often lame and imperfect. In the Abelard and Eloise, he says:

"There died the best of passions, Love and Fame."

This is not a legitimate ellipsis. Fame is not a passion, though love is: but his ear was evidently confused by the meeting of the sounds "love and fame," as if they of themselves immediately implied "love, and love of fame." Pope's rhymes are constantly defective, being rhymes to the eye instead of the ear, and this to a greater degree not only than in later, but than in preceding writers. The praise of his versification must be confined to its uniform smoothness and harmony. In the translation of the Iliad, which has been considered as his masterpiece in style and execution, he continually changes the tenses in the same sentence for the purposes of the rhyme, which shows either a want of technical resources, or great inattention to punctilious exactness. But to have done with this.

The epistle of Eloise to Abelard is the only exception I can think of to the general spirit of the foregoing remarks; and I should be disingenuous not to acknowledge that it is an exception. The foundation is in the letters themselves of Abelard and Eloise, which are quite as impressive, but still in a different way. It is fine as a poem: it is finer as a piece of high-wrought eloquence. No woman could be supposed to write a better love-letter in verse. Besides the richness of the historical materials, the high *gusto* of the original sentiments which Pope had to work upon, there were perhaps circumstances in his own situation which made him enter into the subject with even more than a poet's feeling. The tears shed are drops gushing from the heart: the words are burning sighs breathed from the soul of love. Perhaps the poem to which it bears the greatest similarity in our language, is Dryden's Tancred and Sigismunda, taken from Boccaccio. Pope's Eloise will bear this comparison; and after such a test, with Boccaccio for the original author, and Dryden

for the translator, it need shrink from no other. There is something exceedingly tender and beautiful in the sound of the concluding lines:

> "If ever chance two wandering lovers brings
> To Paraclete's white walls and silver springs," &c.

The Essay on Man is not Pope's best work. It is a theory which Bolingbroke is supposed to have given him, and which he expanded into verse. But "he spins the thread of his verbosity finer than the staple of his argument." All that he says, "the very words, and to the self-same tune," would prove just as well that whatever is, is *wrong*, as that whatever is, is *right*. The Dunciad has splendid passages, but in general it is dull, heavy, and mechanical. The sarcasm already quoted on Settle, the Lord Mayor's poet (for at that time there was a city as well as a court poet)—

> "Now night descending, the proud scene is o'er,
> But lives in Settle's numbers one day more"—

is the finest inversion of immortality conceivable. It is even better than his serious apostrophe to the great heirs of glory, the triumphant bards of antiquity!

The finest burst of severe moral invective in all Pope, is the prophetical conclusion of the epilogue to the Satires:

> "Virtue may chuse the high or low degree,
> 'Tis just alike to virtue and to me;
> Dwell in a monk, or light upon a king,
> She's still the same belov'd, contented thing.
> Vice is undone if she forgets her birth,
> And stoops from angels to the dregs of earth.
> But 'tis the Fall degrades her to a whore:
> Let Greatness own her, and she's mean no more.
> Her birth, her beauty, crowds and courts confess,
> Chaste matrons praise her, and grave bishops bless;
> In golden chains the willing world she draws,
> And hers the gospel is, and hers the laws;

Mounts the tribunal, lifts her scarlet head,
And sees pale Virtue carted in her stead.
Lo! at the wheels of her triumphal car,
Old England's Genius, rough with many a scar,
Dragg'd in the dust! his arms hang idly round,
His flag inverted trains along the ground!
Our youth, all livery'd o'er with foreign gold,
Before her dance; behind her, crawl the old!
See thronging millions to the Pagod run,
And offer country, parent, wife, or son!
Hear her black trumpet through the land proclaim,
That *not to be corrupted is the shame.*
In soldier, churchman, patriot, man in pow'r,
'Tis av'rice all, ambition is no more!
See all our nobles begging to be slaves!
See all our fools aspiring to be knaves!
The wit of cheats, the courage of a whore,
Are what ten thousand envy and adore:
All, all look up with reverential awe,
At crimes that 'scape or triumph o'er the law;
While truth, worth, wisdom, daily they decry:
Nothing is sacred now but villainy.
Yet may this verse (if such a verse remain)
Show there was one who held it in disdain."

His Satires are not, in general, so good as his Epistles. His enmity is effeminate and petulant from a sense of weakness, as his friendship was tender from a sense of gratitude. I do not like, for instance, his character of Chartres, or his characters of women. His delicacy often borders upon sickliness; his fastidiousness makes others fastidious. But his compliments are divine; they are equal in value to a house or an estate. Take the following. In addressing Lord Mansfield, he speaks of the grave as a scene:

"Where Murray, long enough his country's pride,
Shall be no more than Tully, or than Hyde."

To Bolingbroke he says:

"Why rail they then if but one wreath of mine,
Oh all-accomplish'd St. John, deck thy shrine?"

Again, he has bequeathed this praise to Lord Cornbury:

"Despise low thoughts, low gains:
Disdain whatever Cornbury disdains;
Be virtuous and be happy for your pains."

One would think (though there is no knowing) that a descendant of this nobleman, if there be such a person living, could hardly be guilty of a mean or paltry action.

The finest piece of personal satire in Pope (perhaps in the world) is his character of Addison; and this, it may be observed, is of a mixed kind, made up of his respect for the man, and a cutting sense of his failings. The other finest one is that of Buckingham, and the best part of that is the pleasurable:

"—— Alas! how changed from him,
That life of pleasure and that soul of whim:
Gallant and gay, in Cliveden's proud alcove,
The bower of wanton Shrewsbury and love!"

Among his happiest and most inimitable effusions are the Epistles to Arbuthnot and to Jervas the painter: amiable patterns of the delightful unconcerned life, blending ease with dignity, which poets and painters then led. Thus he says to Arbuthnot:

"Why did I write? What sin to me unknown
Dipp'd me in ink, my parents' or my own?
As yet a child, nor yet a fool to fame,
I lisped in numbers, for the numbers came.
I left no calling for this idle trade,
No duty broke, no father disobey'd:
The muse but serv'd to ease some friend, not wife;
To help me through this long disease, my life?
To second, Arbuthnot! thy art and care,
And teach the being you preserv'd to bear.

But why then publish? Granville the polite
And knowing Walsh would tell me I could write:
Well-natur d Garth inflam'd with early praise:
And Congreve lov'd, and Swift endur'd, my lays;
The courtly Talbot, Somers, Sheffield read;
E'en mitred Rochester* would nod the head;

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* Bishop Atterbury.—Ed.

And St. John's self (great Dryden's friend before)
With open arms receiv'd one poet more.
Happy my studies, when by these approv'd!
Happier their author, when by these beloved!
From these the world will judge of men and books,
Not from the Burnets, Oldmixons, and Cooks."

I cannot help giving also the conclusion of the Epistle to Jervas:

"Oh! lasting as those colours may they shine,
Free as thy stroke, yet faultless as thy line;
New graces yearly like thy works display,
Soft without weakness, without glaring gay;
Led by some rule that guides, but not constrains;
And finish'd more through happiness than pains.
The kindred arts shall in their praise conspire,
One dip the pencil, and one string the lyre.
Yet should the Graces all thy figures place,
And breathe an air divine on every face:
Yet should the Muses bid my numbers roll
Strong as their charms, and gentle as their soul:
With Zeuxis' Helen thy Bridgewater vie,
And these be sung till Granville's Myra die:
Alas! how little from the grave we claim!
Thou but preserv'st a face, and I a name."

And shall we cut ourselves off from beauties like these with a theory? Shall we shut up our books, and seal up our senses, to please the dull spite and inordinate vanity of those "who have eyes, but they see not—ears, but they hear not—and understandings, but they understand not," and go about asking our blind guides whether Pope was a poet or not? It will never do. Such persons, when you point out to them a fine passage in Pope, turn it off to something of the same sort in some other writer. Thus they say that the line, "I lisp'd in numbers, for the numbers came," is pretty, but taken from that of Ovid—*Et quum conabar scribere, versus erat.* They are safe in this mode of criticism: there is no danger of anyone's tracing their writings to the classics.

Pope's letters and prose writings neither take away from

nor add to his poetical reputation. There is, occasionally, a littleness of manner and an unnecessary degree of caution. He appears anxious to say a good thing in every word, as well as every sentence. They, however, give a very favourable idea of his moral character in all respects; and his letters to Atterbury, in his disgrace and exile, do equal honour to both. If I had to choose, there are one or two persons—and but one or two—that I should like to have been better than Pope!

Dryden was a better prose-writer, and a bolder and more varied versifier than Pope. He was a more vigorous thinker, a more correct and logical declaimer, and had more of what may be called strength of mind than Pope; but he had not the same refinement and delicacy of feeling. Dryden's eloquence and spirit were possessed in a higher degree by others, and in nearly the same degree by Pope himself; but that by which Pope was distinguished was an essence which he alone possessed, and of incomparable value on that sole account. Dryden's Epistles are excellent, but inferior to Pope's, though they appear (particularly the admirable one to Congreve) to have been the model on which the latter formed his. His Satires are better than Pope's. His Absalom and Achitophel is superior, both in force of invective and discrimination of character, to anything of Pope's in the same way. The character of Achitophel is very fine, and breathes, if not a sincere love for virtue, a strong spirit of indignation against vice.

MacFlecknoe is the origin of the idea of the Dunciad; but it is less elaborately constructed, less feeble, and less heavy. The difference between Pope's satirical portraits and Dryden's appears to be this in a good measure, that Dryden seems to grapple with his antagonists, and to describe real persons; Pope seems to refine upon them in his own mind, and to make them out just what he pleases, till they are not real characters, but the mere drivelling effusions of his

spleen and malice. Pope describes the thing, and then goes on describing his own description, till he loses himself in verbal repetitions. Dryden recurs to the object often, takes fresh sittings of nature, and gives us new strokes of character as well as of his pencil. The Hind and Panther is an allegory as well as a satire, and so far it tells less home; the battery is not so point-blank. But otherwise it has more genius, vehemence, and strength of description than any other of Dryden's works, not excepting the Absalom and Achitophel. It also contains the finest examples of varied and sounding versification. I will quote the following as an instance of what I mean. He is complaining of the treatment which the Papists, under James II., received from the Church of England:

> "Besides these jolly birds, whose corpse impure
> Repaid their commons with their salt manure,
> Another farm he had behind his house,
> Not overstocked, but barely for his use;
> Wherein his poor domestic poultry fed,
> And from his pious hand "received their bread."
> Our pampered pigeons, with malignant eyes,
> Beheld these inmates and their nurseries;
> Though hard their fare, at evening and at morn
> (A cruse of water, and an ear of corn),
> Yet still they grudged that *modicum*, and thought
> A sheaf in every single grain was brought.
> Fain would they filch that little food away,
> While unrestrained those happy gluttons prey;
> And much they grieved to see so nigh their hall,
> The bird that warned St. Peter of his fall;
> That he should raise his mitred crest on high,
> And clap his wings, and call his family
> To sacred rites; and vex the ethereal powers
> With midnight matins at uncivil hours;
> Nay more, his quiet neighbours should molest,
> Just in the sweetness of their morning rest.
> Beast of a bird! supinely when he might
> Lie snug and sleep, to rise before the light!
> What if his dull forefathers us'd that cry,
> Could he not let a bad example die?

The world was fallen into an easier way:
This age knew better than to fast and pray.
Good sense in sacred worship would appear,
So to begin as they might end the year.
Such feats in former times had wrought the falls
Of crowing chanticleers in cloister'd walls.
Expell'd for this, and for their lands they fled;
And sister Partlet with her hooded head
Was hooted hence, because she would not pray a-bed."

There is a magnanimity of abuse in some of these epithets, a fearless choice of topics of invective, which may be considered as the heroical in satire.

The *Annus Mirabilis* is a tedious performance; it is a tissue of far-fetched, heavy, lumbering conceits, and in the worst style of what has been denominated metaphysical poetry. His Odes in general are of the same stamp; they are the hard-strained offspring of a meagre, meretricious fancy. The famous Ode on St. Cecilia deserves its reputation; for, as a piece of poetical mechanism to be set to music, or recited in alternate strophe and antistrophe, with classical allusions and flowing verse, nothing can be better. It is equally fit to be said or sung; it is not equally good to read. It is lyrical without being epic or dramatic. For instance, the description of Bacchus—

"The jolly god in triumph comes,
Sound the trumpets, beat the drums;
Flush'd with a purple grace,
He shows his honest face"—

does not answer, as it ought, to our idea of the god, returning from the conquest of India, with satyrs and wild beasts that he had tamed, following in his train: crowned with vine leaves, and riding in a chariot drawn by leopards —such as we have seen him painted by Titian or Rubens! Lyrical poetry, of all others, bears the nearest resemblance to painting: it deals in hieroglyphics and passing figures, which depend for effect, not on the working out, but on the selection. It is the dance and pantomime of poetry. In

variety and rapidity of movement, the Alexander's Feast has all that can be required in this respect; it only wants loftiness and truth of character.

Dryden's plays are better than Pope could have written; for though he does not go out of himself by the force of imagination, he goes out of himself by the force of commonplaces and rhetorical dialogue. On the other hand, they are not so good as Shakspeare's; but he has left the best character of Shakspeare that has ever been written.*

His alterations from Chaucer and Boccaccio show a greater knowledge of the taste of his readers and power of pleasing them than acquaintance with the genius of his authors. He ekes out the lameness of the verse in the former, and breaks the force of the passion in both. The Tancred and Sigismunda is the only general exception in which, I think, he has fully retained, if not improved upon, the impassioned declamation of the original. The Honoria has none of the bewildered, dreary, preternatural effect of Boccaccio's story. Nor has the Flower and the Leaf anything of the enchanting simplicity and concentrated feeling of Chaucer's romantic fiction. Dryden, how-

* "To begin then with Shakspeare: he was the man who of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the images of nature were still present to him, and he drew them not laboriously, but luckily: when he describes anything, you more than see it—you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learned; he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature; he looked inwards and found her there. I cannot say he is everywhere alike; were he so, I should do him injury to compare him with the greatest of mankind. He is many times flat, and insipid; his comic wit degenerating into clenches, his serious swelling into bombast. But he is always great, when some great occasion is presented to him. No man can say he ever had a fit subject for his wit, and did not then raise himself as high above the rest of poets,

Quantùm lenta solent inter viburna cupressi."

[Virg. Ecl. i. l. 26.]

ever, sometimes seemed to indulge himself as well as his readers, as in keeping entire that noble line in Palamon's address to Venus:

"Thou gladder of the mount of Cithæron!"

His Tales have been, upon the whole, the most popular of his works; and I should think that a translation of some of the other serious tales in Boccaccio and Chaucer, as that of Isabella, the Falcon, of Constance, the Prioress's Tale, and others, if executed with taste and spirit, could not fail to succeed in the present day.

It should appear, in tracing the history of our literature, that poetry had, at the period of which we are speaking, in general declined by successive gradations from the poetry of imagination, in the time of Elizabeth, to the poetry of fancy (to adopt a modern distinction) in the time of Charles I.; and again from the poetry of fancy to that of wit, as in the reign of Charles II. and Queen Anne. It degenerated into the poetry of mere commonplaces, both in style and thought, in the succeeding reigns: as in the latter part of the last century it was transformed, by means of the French Revolution, into the poetry of paradox.

Of Donne I know nothing but some beautiful verses to his wife, dissuading her from accompanying him on his travels abroad, and some quaint riddles in verse, which the Sphinx could not unravel.

Waller still lives in the name of Sacharissa; and his lines on the death of Oliver Cromwell show that he was a man not without genius and strength of thought.

Marvel is a writer of nearly the same period, and worthy of a better age. Some of his verses are harsh, as the words of Mercury: others musical, as is Apollo's lute. Of the latter kind are his boat-song, his description of a fawn, and his lines to Lady Vere. His lines prefixed to Paradise Lost are by no means the most favourable specimen of his powers.

Butler's Hudibras is a poem of more wit than any other in the language. The rhymes have as much genius in them as the thoughts; but there is no story in it, and but little humour. Humour is the making others act or talk absurdly and unconsciously; wit is the pointing out and ridiculing that absurdity consciously, and with more or less ill-nature. The fault of Butler's poem is not that it has too much wit, but that it has not an equal quantity of other things. One would suppose that the starched manners and sanctified grimace of the times in which he lived would of themselves have been sufficiently rich in ludicrous incidents and characters; but they seem rather to have irritated his spleen than to have drawn forth his powers of picturesque imitation. Certainly, if we compare Hudibras with Don Quixote in this respect, it seems rather a meagre and unsatisfactory performance.

Rochester's poetry is the poetry of wit combined with the love of pleasure, of thought with licentiousness. His extravagant heedless levity has a sort of passionate enthusiasm in it; his contempt for everything that others respect almost amounts to sublimity. His poem upon Nothing is itself no trifling work. His epigrams were the bitterest, the least laboured, and the truest, that ever were written.

Sir John Suckling was of the same mercurial stamp, but with a greater fund of animal spirits: as witty, but less malicious. His Ballad on a Wedding is perfect in its kind, and has a spirit of high enjoyment in it, of sportive fancy, a liveliness of description and a truth of nature that never were surpassed. It is superior to either Gay or Prior; for with all their *naïveté* and terseness it has a Shakspearean grace and luxuriance about it which they could not have reached.

Denham and Cowley belong to the same period, but were quite distinct from each other: the one was grave and prosing, the other melancholy and fantastical. There

are a number of good lines and good thoughts in the Cooper's Hill; and in Cowley there is an inexhaustible fund of sense and ingenuity, buried in inextricable conceits, and entangled in the cobwebs of the schools. He was a great man, not a great poet. But I shall say no more on this subject. I never wish to meddle with names that are sacred, unless when they stand in the way of things that are more sacred.

Wither is a name now almost forgotten, and his works seldom read; but his poetry is not unfrequently distinguished by a tender and pastoral turn of thought; and there is one passage of exquisite feeling, describing the consolations of poetry in the following terms:

"She doth tell me where to borrow
Comfort in the midst of sorrow;
Makes the desolatest place *
To her presence be a grace;
And the blackest discontents
Be her fairest ornaments.
In my former days of bliss
Her divine skill taught me this,
That from everything I saw,
I could some invention draw;
And raise pleasure to her height,
Through the meanest object's sight,
By the murmur of a spring,
Or the least bough's rusteling,
By a daisy whose leaves spread,
Shut when Titan goes to bed;
Or a shady bush or tree,
She could more infuse in me,
Than all Nature's beauties can
In some other wiser man.
By her help I also now
Make this churlish place allow
Some things that may sweeten gladness
In the very gall of sadness.

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* Written in the Marshalsea Prison.

The dull loneness, the black shade,
That these hanging vaults have made:
The strange music of the waves,
Beating on these hollow caves:
This black den which rocks emboss,
Overgrown with eldest moss:
The rude portals that give light
More to terror than delight:
This my chamber of neglect,
Wall'd about with disrespect:
From all these and this dull air,
A fit object for despair,
She hath taught me by her might
To draw comfort and delight.
Therefore, thou best earthly bliss,
I will cherish thee for this.
Poesie, thou sweet'st content
That ere Heav'n to mortals lent:
Though they as a trifle leave thee,
Whose dull thoughts cannot conceive thee:
Though thou be to them a scorn,
That to nought but earth are born:
Let my life no longer be
Than I am in love with thee.
Though our wise ones call thee madness,
Let me never taste of sadness,
If I love not thy maddest fits,
Above all their greatest wits.
And though some too seeming holy,
Do account thy raptures folly,
Thou dost teach me to contemn
What makes knaves and fools of them.

LECTURE V.

ON THOMSON AND COWPER.

Thomson, the kind-hearted Thomson, was the most indolent of mortals and of poets. But he was also one of the best both of mortals and of poets. Dr. Johnson makes it his praise that he wrote "no line which dying he would wish to blot." Perhaps a better proof of his honest simplicity and inoffensive goodness of disposition would be that he wrote no line which any other person living would wish that he should blot. Indeed he himself wished, on his death-bed, formally to expunge his dedication of one of the Seasons to that finished courtier and candid biographer of his own life, Bubb Doddington. As critics, however, not as moralists, we might say on the other hand, "Would he had blotted a thousand!" The same suavity of temper and sanguine warmth of feeling which threw such a natural grace and genial spirit of enthusiasm over his poetry, was also the cause of its inherent vices and defects. He is affected through carelessness, pompous from unsuspecting simplicity of character. He is frequently pedantic and ostentatious in his style, because he had no consciousness of these vices in himself. He mounts upon stilts, not out of vanity, but indolence. He seldom writes a good line, but he makes up for it by a bad one. He takes advantage of all the most trite and mechanical commonplaces of imagery and diction as a kindly relief to his Muse, and as if he thought them quite as good, and likely to be quite as acceptable to the reader, as his own poetry. He did not think the difference worth putting himself to the trouble of

accomplishing. He had too little art to conceal his art, or did not even seem to know that there was any occasion for it. His art is as naked and undisguised as his nature; the one is as pure and genuine as the other is gross, gaudy, and meretricious. All that is admirable in the Seasons is the emanation of a fine natural genius, and sincere love of his subject, unforced, unstudied, that comes uncalled-for and departs unbidden. But he takes no pains, uses no self-correction; or if he seems to labour, it is worse than labour lost. His genius "cannot be constrained by mastery." The feeling of nature, of the changes of the seasons, was in his mind; and he could not help conveying this feeling to the reader by the mere force of spontaneous expression; but if the expression did not come of itself, he left the whole business to chance; or, willing to evade instead of encountering the difficulties of his subject, fills up the intervals of true inspiration with the most vapid and worthless materials, pieces out a beautiful half line with a bombastic allusion, or overloads an exquisitely natural sentiment or image with a cloud of painted, pompous, cumbrous phrases, like the shower of roses in which he represents the Spring, his own lovely, fresh, and innocent Spring, as descending to the earth:

> "Come, gentle Spring! ethereal Mildness! come,
> And from the bosom of yon dropping cloud,
> While music wakes around, veil'd in a shower
> Of shadowing roses, on our plains descend."

Who, from such a flimsy, round-about, unmeaning commencement as this, would expect the delightful, unexaggerated, home-felt descriptions of natural scenery, which are scattered in such unconscious profusion through this and the following cantos? For instance, the very next passage is crowded with a set of striking images:

> "And see where surly Winter passes off
> Far to the north, and calls his ruffian blasts;
> His blasts obey, and quit the howling hill,
> The shatter'd forest, and the ravag'd vale;

While softer gales succeed, at whose kind touch
Dissolving snows in livid torrents lost,
The mountains lift their green heads to the sky.
As yet the trembling year is unconfirmed,
And Winter oft at eve resumes the breeze,
Chills the pale morn, and bids his driving sleets
Deform the day delightless; so that scarce
The bittern knows his time with bill ingulpht
To shake the sounding marsh, or from the shore
The plovers when to scatter o'er the heath,
And sing their wild notes to the list'ning waste."

Thomson is the best of our descriptive poets: for he gives most of the poetry of natural description. Others have been quite equal to him, or have surpassed him, as Cowper for instance, in the picturesque part of his art, in marking the peculiar features and curious details of objects; no one has yet come up to him in giving the sum total of their effects, their varying influences on the mind. He does not go into the *minutiæ* of a landscape, but describes the vivid impression which the whole makes upon his own imagination, and thus transfers the same unbroken, unimpaired impression to the imagination of his readers. The colours with which he paints seem yet wet and breathing, like those of the living statue in the Winter's Tale. Nature in his descriptions is seen growing around us, fresh and lusty as in itself. We feel the effect of the atmosphere, its humidity or clearness, its heat or cold, the glow of summer, the gloom of winter, the tender promise of the spring, the full overshadowing foliage, the declining pomp and deepening tints of autumn. He transports us to the scorching heat of vertical suns, or plunges us into the chilling horrors and desolation of the frozen zone. We hear the snow drifting against the broken casement without, and see the fire blazing on the hearth within. The first scattered drops of a vernal shower patter on the leaves above our heads, or the coming storm resounds through the leafless groves. In a word, he describes not to the eye alone, but to the

other senses, and to the whole man. He puts his heart into his subject, writes as he feels, and humanises whatever he touches. He makes all his descriptions teem with life and vivifying soul. His faults were those of his style—of the author and the man; but the original genius of the poet, the pith and marrow of his imagination, the fine natural mould in which his feelings were bedded, were too much for him to counteract by neglect, or affectation, or false ornaments. It is for this reason that he is, perhaps, the most popular of all our poets, treating of a subject that all can understand, and in a way that is interesting to all alike, to the ignorant or the refined, because he gives back the impression which the things themselves make upon us in nature. "That," said a man of genius,* seeing a little shabby soiled copy of Thomson's Seasons lying on the window-seat of an obscure country alehouse, "That is true fame!"

It has been supposed by some, that the Castle of Indolence is Thomson's best poem; but that is not the case. He has in it, indeed, poured out the whole soul of indolence, diffuse, relaxed, supine, dissolved into a voluptuous dream, and surrounded himself with a set of objects and companions, in entire unison with the listlessness of his own temper. Nothing can well go beyond the descriptions of these inmates of the place and their luxurious, pampered way of life—of him who came among them like "a burnished fly in month of June," but soon left them on his heedless way; and him

> "For whom the merry bells had rung, I ween,
> If in this nook of quiet, bells had ever been."

The in-door quiet and cushioned ease, where "all was one full-swelling bed;" the out-of-door stillness, broken only by "the stock-dove's plaint amid the forest deep—"

> "That drowsy rustled to the sighing gale"—

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* Coleridge. See *Memoirs of W. Hazlitt*, 1867, i. 65.—Ed.

are in the most perfect and delightful keeping. But still there are no passages in this exquisite little production of sportive ease and fancy, equal to the best of those in the Seasons. Warton, in his Essay on Pope, was the first to point out and do justice to some of these; for instance, to the description of the effects of the contagion among our ships at Carthagena—"of the frequent corse heard nightly plunged amid the sullen waves," and to the description of the pilgrims lost in the deserts of Arabia. This last passage, profound and striking as it is, is not free from those faults of style which I have already noticed:

"——— Breath'd hot
From all the boundless furnace of the sky,
And the wide-glitt'ring waste of burning sand,
A suffocating wind the pilgrim smites
With instant death. Patient of thirst and toil,
Son of the desert, ev'n the camel feels
Shot through his wither'd heart the fiery blast,
Or from the black-red ether, bursting broad,
Sallies the sudden whirlwind. Straight the sands,
Commov'd around, in gath'ring eddies play;
Nearer and nearer still they dark'ning come,
Till with the gen'ral all-involving storm
Swept up, the whole continuous wilds arise,
And by their noon-day fount dejected thrown,
Or sunk at night in sad disastrous sleep,
Beneath descending hills the caravan
Is buried deep. In Cairo's crowded streets,
Th' impatient merchant, wond'ring, waits in vain;
And Mecca saddens at the long delay."

There are other passages of equal beauty with these: such as that of the hunted stag, followed by "the inhuman rout":

"——— That from the shady depth
Expel him, circling through his ev'ry shift.
He sweeps the forest oft, and sobbing sees
The glades mild op'ning to the golden day,
Where in kind contest with his butting friends
He wont to struggle, or his loves enjoy."

The whole of the description of the frozen zone, in the Winter, is perhaps even finer and more thoroughly felt,

as being done from early associations, than that of the torrid zone in his Summer. Anything more beautiful than the following account of the Siberian exiles is, I think, hardly to be found in the whole range of poetry:

> "There through the prison of unbounded wilds,
> Barr'd by the hand of nature from escape,
> Wide roams the Russian exile. Nought around
> Strikes his sad eye but deserts lost in snow.
> And heavy-loaded groves, and solid floods,
> That stretch athwart the solitary vast
> Their icy horrors to the frozen main;
> And cheerless towns far distant, never bless'd,
> Save when its annual course the caravan
> Bends to the golden course of rich Cathay,
> With news of human kind."

The feeling of loneliness, of distance, of lingering, slow-revolving years of pining expectation, of desolation within and without the heart, was never more finely expressed than it is here.

The account which follows of the employments of the Polar night—of the journeys of the natives by moonlight, drawn by reindeer, and of the return of spring in Lapland—

> "Where pure Niemi's fairy mountains rise,
> And fring'd with roses Tenglio rolls his stream"—

is equally picturesque and striking in a different way. The traveller lost in the snow is a well-known and admirable dramatic episode. I prefer, however, giving one example of our author's skill in painting common domestic scenery, as it will bear a more immediate comparison with the style of some later writers on such subjects. It is of little consequence what passage we take. The following description of the first setting-in of winter is, perhaps, as pleasing as any:

> "Through the hush'd air the whitening shower descends,
> At first thin wav'ring, till at last the flakes
> Fall broad and wide, and fast, dimming the day
> With a continual flow. The c..erish'd fields
> Put on their winter-robe of purest white:

'Tis brightness all, save where the new snow melts
Along the mazy current. Low the woods
Bow their hoar head; and ere the languid Sun
Faint from the West emits his ev'ning ray,
Earth's universal face, deep hid and chill,
Is one wide dazzling waste, that buries wide
The works of man. Drooping, the lab'rer-ox
Stands cover'd o'er with snow, and then demands
The fruit of all his toil. The fowls of heav'n,
Tam'd by the cruel season, crowd around
The winnowing store, and claim the little boon
Which Providence assigns them. One alone,
The redbreast, sacred to the household gods,
Wisely regardful of the embroiling sky,
In joyless fields and thorny thickets leaves
His shivering mates, and pays to trusted man
His annual visit. Half-afraid, he first
Against the window beats; then, brisk, alights
On the warm hearth; then hopping o'er the floor,
Eyes all the smiling family askance,
And pecks, and starts, and wonders where he is:
Till more familiar grown, the table-crumbs
Attract his slender feet. The foodless wilds
Pour forth their brown inhabitants. The hare,
Though timorous of heart, and hard beset
By death in various forms, dark, snares and dogs,
And more unpitying men, the garden seeks,
Urg'd on by fearless want. The bleating kind
Eye the bleak heav'n, and next the glist'ning earth,
With looks of dumb despair; then sad, dispers'd,
Dig for the wither'd herb through heaps of snow."

It is thus that Thomson always gives a *moral sense* to nature.

Thomson's blank verse is not harsh, or utterly untuneable; but it is heavy and monotonous; it seems always labouring up-hill. The selections which have been made from his works in Enfield's Speaker and other books of extracts, do not convey the most favourable idea of his genius or taste, such as Palemon and Lavinia, Damon and Musidora, Celadon and Amelia. Those parts of any author which are most liable to be stitched in worsted, and framed and glazed, are not by any means always

the best. The moral descriptions and reflections in the Seasons are in an admirable spirit, and written with great force and fervour.

His poem on Liberty is not equally good: his Muse was too easy and good-natured for the subject, which required as much indignation against unjust and arbitrary power, as complacency in the constitutional monarchy, under which, just after the expulsion of the Stuarts and the establishment of the House of Hanover in contempt of the claims of hereditary pretenders to the throne, Thomson lived. Thomson was but an indifferent hater; and the most indispensable part of the love of liberty has unfortunately hitherto been the hatred of tyranny. Spleen is the soul of patriotism, and of public good: but you would not expect a man who has been seen eating peaches off a tree with both hands in his waistcoat pockets, to be "overrun with the spleen," or to heat himself needlessly about an abstract proposition.

His plays are liable to the same objection. They are never acted and seldom read. The author could not, or would not, put himself out of his way to enter into the situations and passions of others, particularly of a tragic kind. The subject of Tancred and Sigismunda, which is taken from a serious episode in Gil Blas, is an admirable one, but poorly handled: the ground may be considered as still unoccupied.

Cowper, whom I shall speak of in this connection, lived at a considerable distance of time after Thomson, and had some advantages over him, particularly in simplicity of style, in a certain precision and minuteness of graphical description, and in a more careful and leisurely choice of such topics only as his genius and peculiar habits of mind prompted him to treat of. The Task has fewer blemishes than the Seasons; but it has not the same capital excellence, the "unbought grace" of poetry, the power of moving and infusing the warmth of the author's mind

into that of the reader. If Cowper had a mere polished taste, Thomson had beyond comparison a more fertile genius, more impulsive force, a more entire forgetfulness of himself in his subject. If in Thomson you are sometimes offended with the sloveliness of the author by profession, determined to get through his task at all events, in Cowper you are no less dissatisfied with the finicalness of the private gentleman, who does not care whether he completes his work or not, and in whatever he does, is evidently more solicitous to please himself than the public. There is an effeminacy about him which shrinks from and repels common and hearty sympathy. With all his boasted simplicity and love of the country, he seldom launches out into general descriptions of nature; he looks at her over his clipped hedges, and from his well-swept garden-walks; or if he makes a bolder experiment now and then, it is with an air of precaution, as if he were afraid of being caught in a shower of rain, or of not being able, in case of any untoward accident, to make good his retreat home. He shakes hands with nature with a pair of fashionable gloves on, and leads "his Vashti" forth to public view with a look of consciousness and attention to etiquette, as a fine gentleman hands a lady out to dance a minuet. He is delicate to fastidiousness, and glad to get back, after a romantic adventure with crazy Kate, a party of gypsies or a little child on a common, to the drawing-room and the ladies again, to the sofa and the tea-kettle—no, I beg his pardon, not to the singing, well-scoured tea-kettle, but to the polished and loud-hissing urn. His walks and arbours are kept clear of worms and snails with as much an appearance of *petit-maîtreship* as of humanity. He has some of the sickly sensibility and pampered refinements of Pope; but then Pope prided himself in them: whereas Cowper affects to be all simplicity and plainness. He had neither Thomson's love of the unadorned beauties of nature nor Pope's exquisite

sense of the elegances of art. He was in fact a nervous man, afraid of trusting himself to the seductions of the one, and ashamed of putting forward his pretensions to an intimacy with the other: but to be a coward, is not the way to succeed either in poetry, in war, or in love! Still he is a genuine poet, and deserves all his reputation. His worst vices are amiable weaknesses, elegant trifling. Though there is a frequent dryness, timidity, and jejuneness in his manner, he has left a number of pictures of domestic comfort and social refinement, as well as of natural imagery and feeling, which can hardly be forgotten but with the language itself. Such, among others, are his memorable description of the post coming in, that of the preparations for tea in a winter's evening in the country, of the unexpected fall of snow, of the frosty morning (with the fine satirical transition to the Empress of Russia's palace of ice), and, most of all, the winter's walk at noon. Every one of these may be considered as distinct studies, or highly-finished cabinet-pieces, arranged without order or coherence. I shall be excused for giving the last of them, as what has always appeared to me one of the most feeling, elegant, and perfect specimens of this writer's manner:

"The night was winter in his roughest mood;
The morning sharp and clear. But now at noon
Upon the southern side of the slant hills,
And where the woods fence off the northern blast,
The season smiles, resigning all its rage,
And has the warmth of May. The vault is blue,
Without a cloud, and white without a speck
The dazzling splendour of the scene below.
Again the harmony comes o'er the vale;
And through the trees I view th' embattled tow'r,
Whence all the music. I again perceive
The soothing influence of the wafted strains,
And settle in soft musings as I tread
The walk, still verdant, under oaks and elms,
Whose outspread branches over-arch the glade.

The roof, though movable through all its length,
As the wind sways it, has yet well suffic'd,
And, intercepting in their silent fall
The frequent flakes, has kept a path for me.
No noise is here, or none that hinders thought.
The redbreast warbles still, but is content
With slender notes, and more than half suppress'd.
Pleas'd with his solitude, and flitting light
From spray to spray, where'er he rests he shakes
From many a twig the pendant drops of ice,
That tinkle in the wither'd leaves below.
Stillness, accompanied with sounds so soft,
Charms more than silence. Meditation here
May think down hours to moments. Here the heart
May give a useful lesson to the head,
And Learning wiser grow without his books.
Knowledge and Wisdom, far from being one,
Have oft-times no connection. Knowledge dwells
In heads replete with thoughts of other men:
Wisdom in minds attentive to their own.
Books are not seldom talismans and spells,
By which the magic art of shrewder wits
Holds an unthinking multitude enthrall'd.
Some to the fascination of a name
Surrender judgment hood-wink'd. Some the style
Infatuates, and through labyrinths and wilds
Of error leads them, by a tune entranc'd.
While sloth seduces more, too weak to bear
The insupportable fatigue of thought,
And swallowing therefore without pause or choice
The total grist unsifted, husks and all.
But trees and rivulets, whose rapid course
Defies the check of winter, haunts of deer
And sheep-walks populous with bleating lambs,
And lanes, in which the primrose ere her time
Peeps through the moss that clothes the hawthorn root,
Deceive no student. Wisdom there, and truth
Not shy as in the world, and to be won
By slow solicitation, seize at once
The roving thought, and fix it on themselves."

His satire is also excellent. It is pointed and forcible, with the polished manners of the gentleman and the

honest indignation of the virtuous man. His religious poetry, except where it takes a tincture of controversial heat, wants elevation and fire. His Muse had not a seraph's wing. I might refer, in illustration of this opinion, to the laboured anticipation of the Millennium at the end of the sixth book.* He could describe a piece of shell-work as well as any modern poet: but he could not describe the New Jerusalem so well as John Bunyan; —nor are his verses on Alexander Selkirk so good as Robinson Crusoe. The one is not so much like a vision, nor is the other so much like the reality.

The first volume of Cowper's poems has, however, been less read than it deserved. The comparison in these poems of the proud and humble believer to the peacock and the pheasant, and the parallel between Voltaire and the poor cottager, are exquisite pieces of eloquence and poetry, particularly the last:

> "Yon cottager, who weaves at her own door,
> Pillow and bobbins all her little store;
> Content though mean, and cheerful if not gay,
> Shuffling her threads about the live-long day,
> Just earns a scanty pittance, and at night
> Lies down secure, her heart and pocket light.
> She, for her humble sphere by nature fit,
> Has little understanding and no wit,
> Receives no praise; but, though her lot be such
> (Toilsome and indigent), she renders much;
> Just knows, and knows no more, her Bible true—
> A truth the brilliant Frenchman never knew;
> And in that charter reads with sparkling eyes
> Her title to a treasure in the skies.
>
> O happy peasant! O unhappy bard!
> His the mere tinsel, hers the rich reward;
> He prais'd, perhaps, for ages yet to come,
> She never heard of half a mile from home:
> He lost in errors his vain heart prefers,
> She safe in the simplicity of hers."

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* Of the *Task*.—Ed.

His character of Whitfield, in the poem on Hope, is one of his most spirited and striking things. It is written *con amore:*

> "But if, unblameable in word and thought,
> A man arise, a man whom God has taught,
> With all Elijah's dignity of tone
> And all the love of the beloved John,
> To storm the citadels they build in air,
> To smite the untemper'd wall ('tis death to spare),
> To sweep away all refuges of lies,
> And place, instead of quirks, themselves devise,
> Lama Sabachthani before their eyes;
> To show that without Christ all gain is loss,
> All hope despair that stands not on His cross;
> Except a few his God may have impressed,
> A tenfold phrensy seizes all the rest."

These lines were quoted, soon after their appearance, by the Monthly Reviewers, to show that Cowper was no poet, though they afterwards took credit to themselves for having been the first to introduce his verses to the notice of the public. It is not a little remarkable that these same critics regularly damned, at its first coming out, every work which has since acquired a standard reputation with the public. Cowper's verses on his mother's picture, and his lines to Mary, are some of the most pathetic that ever were written. His stanzas on the loss of the Royal George have a masculine strength and feeling beyond what was usual with him. The story of John Gilpin has perhaps given as much pleasure to as many people as anything of the same length that ever was written.

His life was an unhappy one. It was embittered by a morbid affection and by his religious sentiments. Nor are we to wonder at this, or bring it as a charge against religion; for it is the nature of the poetical temperament to carry everything to excess, whether it be love, religion, pleasure, or pain, as we may see in the case of Cowper and of Burns, and to find torment or rapture in that in

which others merely find a resource from *ennui*, or a relaxation from common occupation.

There are two poets still living who belong to the same class of excellence, and of whom I shall here say a few words: I mean Crabbe, and Robert Bloomfield, the author of the Farmer's Boy. As a painter of simple natural scenery, and of the still life of the country, few writers have more undeniable and unassuming pretensions than the ingenious and self-taught poet last-mentioned. Among the sketches of this sort I would mention, as equally distinguished for delicacy, faithfulness, and *naïveté*, his description of lambs racing, of the pigs going out an acorning, of the boy sent to feed his sheep before the break of day in winter; and I might add the innocently-told story of the poor bird-boy, who in vain through the live-long day expects his promised companions at his hut, to share his feast of roasted sloes with him, as an example of that humble pathos in which this author excels. The fault indeed of his genius is that it is too humble: his Muse has something not only rustic, but menial in her aspect. He seems afraid of elevating nature, lest she should be ashamed of him. Bloomfield very beautifully describes the lambs in spring-time as racing round the hillocks of green turf: Thomson, in describing the same image, makes the mound of earth the remains of an old Roman encampment. Bloomfield never gets beyond his own experience; and that is somewhat confined. He gives the simple appearance of nature, but he gives it naked, shivering, and unclothed with the drapery of a moral imagination. His poetry has much the effect of the first approach of spring, "while yet the year is unconfirmed," where a few tender buds venture forth here and there, but are chilled by the early frosts and nipping breath of poverty. It should seem from this and other instances that have occurred within the last century, that we cannot expect from original genius alone, without education, in modern

and more artificial periods, the same bold and independent results as in former periods. And one reason appears to be that, though such persons, from whom we might at first expect a restoration of the good old times of poetry, are not encumbered and enfeebled by the trammels of custom and the dull weight of other men's ideas, yet they are oppressed by the consciousness of a want of the common advantages which others have, are looking at the tinsel finery of the age, while they neglect the rich unexplored mine in their own breasts, and instead of setting an example for the world to follow, spend their lives in aping, or in the despair of aping, the hackneyed accomplishments of their inferiors. Another cause may be, that original genius alone is not sufficient to produce the highest excellence without a corresponding state of manners, passions, and religious belief—that no single mind can move in direct opposition to the vast machine of the world around it—that the poet can do no more than stamp the mind of his age upon his works—and that all that the ambition of the highest genius can hope to arrive at after the lapse of one or two generations, is the perfection of that more refined and effeminate style of studied elegance and adventitious ornament, which is the result, not of nature, but of art. In fact, no other style of poetry has succeeded, or seems likely to succeed, in the present day. The public taste hangs like a millstone round the neck of all original genius that does not conform to established and exclusive models. The writer is not only without popular sympathy, but without a rich and varied mass of materials for his mind to work upon and assimilate unconsciously to itself; his attempts at originality are looked upon as affectation, and in the end degenerate into it from the natural spirit of contradiction and the constant uneasy sense of disappointment and undeserved ridicule. But to return.

Crabbe is, if not the most natural, the most literal of

our descriptive poets. He exhibits the smallest circumstances of the smallest things. He gives the very costume of meanness, the non-essentials of every trifling incident. He is his own landscape-painter and engraver too. His pastoral scenes seem pricked on paper in little dotted lines. He describes the interior of a cottage like a person sent there to distrain for rent. He has an eye to the number of arms in an old worm-eaten chair, and takes care to inform himself and the reader whether a joint-stool stands upon three legs or upon four. If a settle by the fire-side stands awry, it gives him as much disturbance as a tottering world: and he records the rent in a ragged counterpane as an event in history. He is equally curious in his backgrounds and in his figures. You know the christian and surnames of every one of his heroes, the dates of their achievements, whether on a Sunday or a Monday, their place of birth and burial, the colour of their clothes and of their hair, and whether they squinted or not. He takes an inventory of the human heart exactly in the same manner as of the furniture of a sick room: his sentiments have very much the air of fixtures; he gives you the petrifaction of a sigh, and carves a tear, to the life, in stone. Almost all his characters are tired of their lives, and you heartily wish them dead. They remind one of anatomical preservations, or may be said to bear the same relation to actual life that a stuffed cat in a glass-case does to the real one purring on the hearth: the skin is the same, but the life and the sense of heat is gone. Crabbe's poetry is like a museum or curiosity-shop: everything has the same posthumous appearance the same inanimateness and identity of character. If Bloomfield is too much of the farmer's boy, Crabbe is too much of the parish beadle, [of] an overseer of the country poor. He has no delight beyond the walls of a work-house, and his officious zeal would convert the world into a vast infirmary. He is a kind of Ordinary, not of New-

gate, but of nature. His poetical morality is taken from Burn's Justice, or the Statutes against Vagrants. He sets his own imagination in the stocks, and his Muse, like Malvolio, "wears cross garters." He collects all the petty vices of the human heart, and superintends, as in a panopticon, a select circle of rural malefactors. He makes out the poor to be as bad as the rich—a sort of vermin for the others to hunt down and trample upon, and this he thinks a good piece of work. With him there are but two moral categories, riches and poverty, authority and dependence. His parish apprentice, Richard Monday, and his wealthy baronet, Sir Richard Monday, of Monday Place, are the same individual—the extremes of the same character, and of his whole system. "The latter end of his Commonwealth does not forget the beginning." But his parish ethics are the very worst models for a state: anything more degrading and helpless cannot well be imagined. He exhibits just the contrary view of human life to that which Gay has done in his Beggar's Opera. In a word. Crabbe is the only poet who has attempted and succeeded in the *still life* of tragedy: who gives the stagnation of hope and fear—the deformity of vice without the temptation—the pain of sympathy without the interest—and who seems to rely, for the delight he is to convey to his reader, on the truth and accuracy with which he describes only what is disagreeable.

The best descriptive poetry is not, after all, to be found in our descriptive poets. There are set descriptions of the flowers, for instance, in Thomson, Cowper, and others; but none equal to those in Milton's Lycidas and in the Winter's Tale.

We have few good pastorals in the language. Our manners are not Arcadian; our climate is not an eternal spring; our age is not the age of gold. We have no pastoral writers equal to Theocritus,* nor any landscapes like

* Except, perhaps, Allan Ramsay, whose *Gentle Shepherd* was

those of Claude Lorraine. The best parts of Spenser's Shepherd's Calendar are two fables, Mother Hubbard's Tale, and the Oak and the Briar; which last is as splendid a piece of oratory as any to be found in the records of the eloquence of the British senate! Browne, who came after Spenser, and Wither have left some pleasing allegorical poems of this kind. Pope's are as full of senseless finery and trite affectation, as if a peer of the realm were to sit for his picture with a crook and cocked hat on, smiling with an insipid air of no-meaning, between nature and fashion. Sir Philip Sidney's Arcadia is a lasting monument of perverted power; where an image of extreme beauty, as that of "the shepherd boy piping as though he should never be old," peeps out once in a hundred folio pages, amidst heaps of intricate sophistry and scholastic quaintness. It is not at all like Nicholas Poussin's picture, in which he represents some shepherds wandering out in a morning of the spring, and coming to a tomb with this inscription—"I also was an Arcadian!" Perhaps the best pastoral in the language is that prose-poem, Walton's Complete Angler. That well-known work has a beauty and romantic interest equal to its simplicity, and arising out of it. In the description of a fishing-tackle, you perceive the piety and humanity of the author's mind. It is to be doubted whether Sannazarius's Piscatory Eclogues are equal to the scenes described by Walton on the banks of the river Lea. He gives the feeling of the open air: we walk with him along the dusty road-side, or repose on the banks of the river under a shady tree; and in watching for the finny prey, imbibe what he beautifully calls "the patience and simplicity of poor honest fishermen." We accompany them to their inn at

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produced in a climate even less Arcadian than that of England. Gay's *Pastorals* scarcely answer to the description. They are not, strictly speaking, bucolics.—Ed.

night, and partake of their simple but delicious fare; while Maud, the pretty milk-maid, at her mother's desire, sings the classical ditties* of the poet Marlowe: "Come live with me, and be my love." Good cheer is not neglected in this work, any more than in Homer, or any other history that sets a proper value on the good things of this life. The prints in the Complete Angler give an additional reality and interest to the scenes it describes. While Tottenham Cross shall stand, and longer, thy work, amiable and happy old man, shall last! It is in the notes to it that we find that character of "a fair and happy milk-maid," by Sir Thomas Overbury, which may vie in beauty and feeling with Chaucer's character of Griselda:

"A fair and happy milk-maid is a country wench that is so far from making herself beautiful by art, that one look of hers is able to put all face-physic out of countenance. She knows a fair look is but a dumb orator to commend virtue, therefore minds it not. All her excellences stand in her so silently, as if they had stolen upon her without her knowledge. The lining of her apparel (which is herself) is far better than outsides of tissue; for though she be not arrayed in the spoil of the silk-worm, she is decked in innocency, a far better wearing. She doth not, with lying long a-bed, spoil both her complexion and conditions. Nature hath taught her too immoderate sleep is rust to the soul: she rises therefore with chanticleer, her dame's cock, and at night makes the lamb her curfew. . . . Her breath is her own, which scents all the year long of June, like a new-made haycock. She makes her hand hard with labour, and her heart soft with pity: and when winter evenings fall early (sitting at her merry wheel) she sings a defiance to the giddy wheel of Fortune. She doth all things with so sweet a grace, it seems ignorance will not suffer her to do ill, being her mind is to do well. She bestows her year's wages at next fair; and in choosing her garments, counts no bravery in the world like decency. The garden and bee-hive are all her physic and chirurgery, and she lives the longer for't. She dares go alone and unfold sheep in the night, and fears no manner of ill, because she means none: yet, to say the truth, she is never alone, for she is still accompanied with old songs, honest thoughts, and prayers, but short ones; yet they have their

* *Ditty*, not *ditties;* the other songs introduced into the work are not Marlowe's.—Ed.

efficacy, in that they are not palled with ensuing idle cogitations. Lastly, her dreams are so chaste, that she dare tell them; only a Friday's dream is all her superstition; that she conceals for fear of anger. Thus lives she; and all her care is she may die in the spring-time to have store of flowers stuck upon her winding-sheet."

The love of the country has been sung by poets, and echoed by philosophers; but the first have not attempted, and the last have been greatly puzzled, to account for it. I do not know that any one has ever explained satisfactorily the true source of this feeling, or of that soothing emotion which the sight of the country, or a lively description of rural objects, hardly ever fails to infuse into the mind. Some have ascribed this feeling to the natural beauty of the objects themselves: others to the freedom from care, the silence and tranquillity which scenes of retirement afford; others to the healthy and innocent employments of a country life; others to the simplicity of country manners, and others to a variety of different causes; but none to the right one. All these, indeed, have their effect; but there is another principal one which has not been touched upon, or only slightly glanced at. I will not, however, imitate Mr. Horne Tooke, who, after enumerating seventeen different definitions of the verb, and laughing at them all as deficient and nugatory, at the end of two quarto volumes does not tell us what the verb really is, and has left posterity to pluck out "the heart of his mystery." I will say at once what it is that distinguishes this interest from others, and that is its *abstractedness*. The interest we feel in human nature is exclusive, and confined to the individual; the interest we feel in external nature is common, and transferable from one object to all others of the same class. Thus:

Rousseau in his Confessions relates, that when he took possession of his room at Annecy, he found that he could see "a little spot of green" from his window, which endeared his situation the more to him, because, he says, it

was the first time he had had this object constantly before him since he left Boissy, the place where he was at school when a child.* Some such feeling as that here described will be found lurking at the bottom of all our attachments of this sort. Were it not for the recollections habitually associated with them, natural objects could not interest the mind in the manner they do. No doubt, the sky is beautiful, the clouds sail majestically along its bosom; the sun is cheering; there is something exquisitely graceful in the manner in which a plant or tree puts forth its branches; the motion with which they bend and tremble in the evening breeze is soft and lovely; there is music in the babbling of a brook; the view from the top of a mountain is full of grandeur; nor can we behold the ocean with indifference. Or, as the Minstrel sweetly sings:

"Oh, how canst thou renounce the boundless store
Of charms which nature to her votary yields!
The warbling woodland, the resounding shore,
The pomp of groves, and garniture of fields;
All that the genial ray of morning gilds,
And all that echoes to the song of even,
All that the mountain's sheltering bosom shields,
And all the dread magnificence of heaven;
Oh, how canst thou renounce, and hope to be forgiven!"

It is not, however, the beautiful and magnificent alone that we admire in Nature; the most insignificant and rudest objects are often found connected with the strongest emotions; we become attached to the most common and familiar images, as to the face of a friend whom we have long known, and from whom we have received many benefits. It is because natural objects have been associated with the sports of our childhood, with air and exercise, with our feelings in solitude, when the mind takes the strongest hold of things, and clings with the fondest interest to whatever strikes its attention: with change of

* Pope also declares that he had a particular regard for an old post which stood in the court-yard before the house where he was brought up.

place, the pursuit of new scenes, and thoughts of distant friends; it is because they have surrounded us in almost all situations, in joy and in sorrow, in pleasure and in pain; because they have been one chief source and nourishment of our feelings, and a part of our being, that we love them as we do ourselves.

There is, generally speaking, the same foundation for our love of Nature as for all our habitual attachments, namely, association of ideas. But this is not all. That which distinguishes this attachment from others is the transferable nature of our feelings with respect to physical objects; the associations connected with any one object extending to the whole class. Our having been attached to any particular person does not make us feel the same attachment to the next person we may chance to meet; but, if we have once associated strong feelings of delight with the objects of natural scenery, the tie becomes indissoluble, and we shall ever after feel the same attachment to other objects of the same sort. I remember when I was abroad * the trees and grass and wet leaves, rustling in the walks of the Tuileries, seemed to be as much English, to be as much the same trees and grass that I had always been used to, as the sun shining over my head was the same sun which I saw in England; the faces only were foreign to me. Whence comes this difference? It arises from our always imperceptibly connecting the idea of the individual with man, and only the idea of the class with natural objects. In the one case, the external appearance or physical structure is the least thing to be attended to; in the other, it is everything. The springs that move the human form, and make it friendly or adverse to me, lie hid within it. There is an infinity of motives, passions, and ideas contained in that narrow compass, of which I know nothing, and in which I have no share. Each individual is a world to himself, governed by a thousand

* In 1802.—Ed.

contradictory and wayward impulses. I can therefore make no inference from one individual to another; nor can my habitual sentiments, with respect to any individual, extend beyond himself to others. A crowd of people presents a disjointed, confused, and unsatisfactory appearance to the eye, because there is nothing to connect the motley assemblage into one continuous or general impression, unless when there is some common object of interest to fix their attention, as in the case of a full pit at the play-house. The same principle will also account for that feeling of littleness, vacuity, and perplexity, which a stranger feels on entering the streets of a populous city. Every individual he meets is a blow to his personal identity. Every new face is a teasing, unanswered riddle. He feels the same wearisome sensation in walking from Oxford Street to Temple Bar, as a person would do who should be compelled to read through the first leaf of all the volumes in a library. But it is otherwise with respect to Nature. A flock of sheep is not a contemptible, but a beautiful sight. The greatest number and variety of physical objects do not puzzle the will, or distract the attention, but are massed together under one uniform and harmonious feeling. The heart reposes in greater security on the immensity of Nature's works, "expatiates freely there," and finds elbow-room and breathing-space. We are always at home with Nature. There is neither hypocrisy, caprice, nor mental reservation in her favours. Our intercourse with her is not liable to accident or change, suspicion or disappointment: she smiles on us still the same. A rose is always sweet, a lily is always beautiful: we do not hate the one, nor envy the other. If we have once enjoyed the cool shade of a tree, and been lulled into a deep repose by the sound of a brook running at its foot, we are sure that wherever we can find a shady stream, we can enjoy the same pleasure again; so that when we imagine these objects, we can easily form a mystic per-

sonification of the friendly power that inhabits them, Dryad or Naiad, offering its cool fountain or its tempting shade. Hence the origin of the Grecian mythology. All objects of the same kind being the same, not only in their appearance, but in their practical uses, we habitually confound them together under the same general idea; and whatever fondness we may have conceived for one, is immediately placed to the common account. The most opposite kinds and remote trains of feeling gradually go to enrich the same sentiment; and in our love of Nature, there is all the force of individual attachment, combined with the most airy abstraction. It is this circumstance which gives that refinement, expansion and wild interest to feelings of this sort, when strongly excited, which every one must have experienced, who is a true lover of Nature.

It is the same setting sun that we see and remember year after year, through summer and winter, seed-time and harvest. The moon that shines above our heads, or plays through the chequered shade, is the same moon that we used to read of in Mrs. Radcliffe's romances. We see no difference in the trees first covered with leaves in the spring. The dry reeds rustling on the side of a stream—the woods swept by the loud blast—the dark massy foliage of autumn—the grey trunks and naked branches of the trees in winter—the sequestered copse, and wide-extended heath—the glittering sunny showers and December snows—are still the same, or accompanied with the same thoughts and feelings: there is no object, however trifling or rude, that does not in some mood or other find its way into the heart, as a link in the chain of our living being; and this it is that makes good that saying of the poet:

> "To me the meanest flower that blows can give
> Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."

Thus Nature is a kind of universal home, and every object it presents to us, an old acquaintance with unaltered

looks; for there is that consent and mutual harmony among all her works, one undivided spirit pervading them throughout, that to him who has well acquainted himself with them, they speak always the same well-known language, striking on the heart, amidst unquiet thoughts and the tumult of the world, like the music of one's native tongue heard in some far-off country:

> "My heart leaps up when I behold
> A rainbow in the sky:
> So was it when my life began,
> So is it now I am a man,
> So shall it be when I grow old and die.
> The child's the father of the man,
> And I would have my years to be
> Linked each to each by natural piety."

The daisy that first strikes the child's eye in trying to leap over his own shadow, is the same flower that with timid upward glance implores the grown man not to tread upon it. Rousseau, in one of his botanical excursions, meeting with the periwinkle, fell upon his knees, crying out—*Ah! voilà de la pervenche!* It was because he had thirty years before brought home the same flower with him in one of his rambles with Madame de Warens, near Chambery. It struck him as the same identical little blue flower that he remembered so well; and thirty years of sorrow and bitter regret were effaced from his memory. That, or a thousand other flowers of the same name, were the same to him, to the heart, and to the eye; but there was but one Madame Warens in the world, whose image was never absent from his thoughts: with whom flowers and verdure sprang up beneath his feet, and without whom all was cold and barren in nature and in his own breast. The cuckoo, "that wandering voice" that comes and goes with the spring, mocks our ears with one note from youth to age; and the lapwing, screaming round the traveller's path, repeats for ever the same sad story of Tereus and Philomel!

LECTURE VI.

ON GAY, SWIFT, YOUNG, COLLINS, &c.

I SHALL in the present Lecture go back to the age of Queen Anne, and endeavour to give a cursory account of the most eminent of our poets, of whom I have not already spoken, from that period to the present.

The three principal poets among the wits of Queen Anne's reign, next to Pope, were Prior, Swift, and Gay. Parnell, though a good-natured, easy man, and a friend to poets and the Muses, was himself little more than an occasional versifier; and Arbuthnot, who had as much wit as the best of them, chose to show it in prose, and not in verse. He had a very notable share in the immortal History of John Bull, and the inimitable and praiseworthy Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus. There has been a great deal said and written about the plagiarisms of Sterne; but the only real plagiarism he has been guilty of (if such theft were a crime), is in taking Tristram Shandy's father from Martin's, the elder Scriblerus. The original idea of the character, that is, of the opinionated, captious old gentleman who is pedantic, not from profession, but choice, belongs to Arbuthnot. Arbuthnot's style is distinguished from that of his contemporaries even by a greater degree of terseness and conciseness. He leaves out every superfluous word, is sparing of connecting particles, and introductory phrases, uses always the simplest forms of construction, and is more a master of the idiomatic peculiarities and internal resources of the language than almost any other writer. There is a re-

search in the choice of a plain, as well as of an ornamented or learned style; and, in fact, a great deal more. Among common English words, there may be ten expressing the same thing with different degrees of force and propriety, and only one of them the very word we want, because it is the only one that answers exactly with the idea we have in our minds. Each word in familiar use has a different set of associations and shades of meaning attached to it, and distinguished from each other by inveterate custom; and it is in having the whole of these at our command, and in knowing which to choose, as they are called for by the occasion, that the perfection of a pure conversational prose-style consists. But in writing a florid and artificial style, neither the same range of invention, nor the same quick sense of propriety—nothing but learning, is required. If you know the words and their general meaning, it is sufficient: it is impossible you should know the nicer inflections of signification, depending on an endless variety of application, in expressions borrowed from a foreign or dead language. They all impose upon the ear alike, because they are not familiar to it; the only distinction left is between the pompous and the plain; the *sesquipedalia verba* have this advantage, that they are all of one length; and any words are equally fit for a learned style, so that we have never heard them before. Themistocles thought that the same sounding epithets could not suit all subjects, as the same dress does not fit all persons. The style of our modern prose-writers is very fine in itself; but it wants variety of inflection and adaptation: it hinders us from seeing the differences of the things it undertakes to describe.

What I have here insisted on will be found to be the leading distinction between the style of Swift, Arbuthnot, Steele, and the other writers of the age of Queen Anne, and the style of Dr. Johnson, which succeeded to it.

The one is English, and the other is not. The writers first mentioned, in order to express their thoughts, looked about them for the properest word to convey any idea, that the language which they spoke, and which their countrymen understood, afforded: Dr. Johnson takes the first English word that offers, and by translating it at a venture into the first Greek or Latin word he can think of, only retaining the English termination, produces an extraordinary effect upon the reader by much the same sort of mechanical process that Trim converted the old jack-boots into a pair of new mortars.

Dr. Johnson was a lazy learned man, who liked to think and talk, better than to read or write—who, however, wrote much and well, but too often by rote. His long compound Latin phrases required less thought, and took up more room than others. What shows the facilities afforded by this style of imposing generalisation is, that it was instantly adopted with success by all those who were writers by profession, or who were not, and that at present we cannot see a lottery puff or a quack advertisement pasted against a wall that is not perfectly Johnsonian in style. Formerly, the learned had the privilege of translating their notions into Latin; and a great privilege it was, as it confined the reputation and emoluments of learning to themselves. Dr. Johnson may be said to have naturalised this privilege, by inventing a sort of jargon translated half-way out of one language into the other, which raised the Doctor's reputation, and confounded all ranks in literature.

In the short period above alluded to, authors professed to write as other men spoke; everybody now affects to speak as authors write; and any one who retains the use of his mother tongue either in writing or conversation, is looked upon as a very illiterate character.

Prior and Gay belong, in the characteristic excellences of their style, to the same class of writers with Suckling,

Rochester, and Sedley: the former imbibed most of the licentious levity of the age of Charles II. and carried it on beyond the Revolution under King William. Prior has left no single work equal to Gay's Fables or the Beggar's Opera. But in his lyrical and fugitive pieces he has shown even more genius, more playfulness, more mischievous gaiety. No one has exceeded him in the laughing grace with which he glances at a subject that will not bear examining, with which he gently hints at what cannot be directly insisted on, with which he half conceals, and half draws aside the veil from some of the Muses' nicest mysteries. His Muse is, in fact, a giddy wanton flirt, who spends her time in playing at snap-dragon and blind-man's buff, who tells what she should not, and knows more than she tells. She laughs at the tricks she shows us, and blushes, or would be thought to do so, at what she keeps concealed. Prior has translated several of Fontaine's Tales from the French; and they have lost nothing in the translation either of their wit or malice. I need not name them: but the one I like the most, is that of Cupid in Search of Venus's Doves. No one could insinuate a knavish plot, a tender point, a loose moral with such unconscious archness and careless raillery, as if he gained new self-possession and adroitness from the perplexity and confusion into which he throws scrupulous imaginations, and knew how to seize on all the ticklish parts of his subject, from their involuntarily shrinking under his grasp. Some of his imitations of Boileau's servile addresses to Louis XIV., which he has applied with a happy mixture of wit and patriotic enthusiasm to King William, or as he familiarly calls him, to

> "Little Will, the scourge of France,
> No Godhead, but the first of men,"

are excellent, and show the same talent for *double-entendre* and the same gallantry of spirit, whether in the softer

lyric or the more lively heroic. Some of Prior's *bon mots* are the best that are recorded. His serious poetry, as his *Solomon*, is as heavy as his familiar style was light and agreeable. His moral Muse is a Magdalen, and should not have obtruded herself on public view. Henry and Emma is a paraphrase of the old ballad of the Nut-brown Maid, and not so good as the original. In short, as we often see in other cases, where men thwart their own genius, Prior's sentimental and romantic productions are mere affectation, the result not of powerful impulse or real feeling, but of a consciousness of his deficiencies, and a wish to supply their place by labour and art.

Gay was sometimes grosser than Prior, not systematically, but inadvertently—from not being so well aware of what he was about; nor was there the same necessity for caution, for his grossness is by no means so seductive or inviting.

Gay's Fables are certainly a work of great merit, both as to the quantity of invention implied, and as to the elegance and facility of the execution. They are, however, spun out too long; the descriptions and narrative are too diffuse and desultory; and the moral is sometimes without point. They are more like Tales than Fables. The best are, perhaps, the Hare with Many Friends, the Monkeys, and the Fox at the Point of Death. His Pastorals are pleasing and poetical. But his capital work is his Beggar's Opera. It is indeed a masterpiece of wit and genius, not to say of morality. In composing it, he chose a very unpromising ground to work upon, and he has prided himself in adorning it with all the graces, the precision, and brilliancy of style. It is a vulgar error to call this a vulgar play. So far [is it] from it, that I do not scruple to say that it appears to me one of the most refined productions in the language. The elegance of the composition is in exact proportion to the coarseness of the materials: by "happy alchemy of mind,"

the author has extracted an essence of refinement from the dregs of human life, and turns its very dross into gold. The scenes, characters, and incidents are, in themselves, of the lowest and most disgusting kind: but, by the sentiments and reflections which are put into the mouths of highwaymen, turnkeys, their mistresses, wives or daughters, he has converted this motley group into a set of fine gentlemen and ladies, satirists and philosophers. He has also effected this transformation without once violating probability, or "o'erstepping the modesty of nature." In fact, Gay has turned the tables on the critics, and by the assumed license of the mock-heroic style has enabled himself to *do justice to nature*, that is, to give all the force, truth, and locality of real feeling to the thoughts and expressions, without being called to the bar of false taste and affected delicacy. The extreme beauty and feeling of the song, "Woman is like the fair flower in its lustre," are only equalled by its characteristic propriety and *naïveté*. *Polly* describes her lover going to the gallows with the same touching simplicity, and with all the natural fondness of a young girl in her circumstances, who sees in his approaching catastrophe nothing but the misfortunes and the personal accomplishments of the object of her affections. "I see him sweeter than the nosegay in his hand; the admiring crowd lament that so lovely a youth should come to an untimely end: even butchers weep, and Jack Ketch refuses his fee rather than consent to tie the fatal knot." The preservation of the character and costume is complete. It has been said by a great authority: "There is some soul of goodness in things evil;" and the *Beggar's Opera* is a good-natured but instructive comment on this text. The poet has thrown all the gaiety and sunshine of the imagination, all the intoxication of pleasure, and the vanity of despair, round the short-lived existence of his heroes; while *Peachum* and *Lockitt* are seen in the background, parcel-

ling out their months and weeks between them. The general view exhibited of human life is of the most subtle and abstracted kind. The author has with great felicity brought out the good qualities and interesting emotions almost inseparable from the lowest conditions; and with the same penetrating glance has detected the disguises which rank and circumstances lend to exalted vice. Every line in this sterling comedy sparkles with wit, and is fraught with the keenest sarcasm. The very wit, however, takes off from the offensiveness of the satire; and I have seen great statesmen, very great statesmen, heartily enjoying the joke, laughing most immoderately at the compliments paid to them as not much worse than pickpockets and cut-throats in a different line of life, and pleased, as it were, to see themselves humanised by some sort of fellowship with their kind. Indeed, it may be said that the moral of the piece is *to show the vulgarity of vice*, or that the same violations of integrity and decorum, the same habitual sophistry in palliating their want of principle, are common to the great and powerful with the meanest and most contemptible of the species. What can be more convincing than the arguments used by these would-be politicians, to show that in hypocrisy, selfishness, and treachery, they do not come up to many of their betters? The exclamation of *Mrs. Peachum*, when her daughter marries *Macheath*, "Hussy, hussy, you will be as ill used, and as much neglected, as if you had married a lord," is worth all Mrs. Hannah More's laboured invectives on the laxity of the manners of high life!

I shall conclude this account of Gay with his verses on Sir Richard Blackmore, which may serve at once as a specimen of his own manner, and as a character of a voluminous contemporary poet, who was admired by Mr. Locke, and knighted by King William III.:

"See who ne'er was nor will be half-read,
Who first sung Arthur, then sung Alfred;

Praised great Eliza in God's anger,
Till all true Englishmen cried, "Hang her!"—
Maul'd human wit in one thick satire;
Next in three books spoil'd human nature:
Undid Creation at a jerk,
And of Redemption made damn'd work.
Then took his Muse at once, and dipt her
Full in the middle of the Scripture:
What wonders there the man, grown old, did?
Sternhold himself he out-Sternholded.
Made David seem so mad and freakish,
All thought him just what thought King Achish.
No mortal read his Solomon
But judg'd Re'boam his own son.
Moses he serv'd as Moses Pharaoh,
And Deborah as she Siserah;
Made Jeremy full sore to cry,
And Job himself curse God and die.
What punishment all this must follow?
Shall Arthur use him like King Tolo?
Shall David as Uriah slay him?
Or dextrous Deborah Siserah him?
No! none of these! Heaven spare his life!
But send him, honest Job, thy wife!"

Gay's Trivia, or Art of Walking the Streets, is as pleasant as walking the streets must have been at the time when it was written. His ballad of Black-eyed Susan is one of the most delightful that can be imagined; nor do I see that it is a bit the worse for Mr. Jekyll's parody on it.

Swift's reputation as a poet has been in a manner obscured by the greater splendour, by the natural force and inventive genius of his prose writings; but if he had never written either the Tale of a Tub or Gulliver's Travels, his name merely as a poet would have come down to us, and have gone down to posterity with well-earned honours. His Imitations of Horace, and still more his Verses on his own Death, place him in the first rank of agreeable moralists in verse. There is not only a dry humour, an exquisite tone of irony, in these productions of his pen; but there is a touching, unpretending pathos, mixed up with the

most whimsical and eccentric strokes of pleasantry and satire. His Description of the Morning in London, and of a City Shower, which were first published in the Tatler, are among the most delightful of the contents of that very delightful work. Swift shone as one of the most sensible of the poets; he is also distinguished as one of the most nonsensical of them. No man has written so many lack-a-daisical, slip-shod, tedious, trifling, foolish, fantastical verses as he, which are so little an imputation on the wisdom of the writer, and which in fact only show his readiness to oblige others, and to forget himself. He has gone so far as to invent a new stanza of fourteen and sixteen syllable lines for Mary the cookmaid to vent her budget of nothings, and for Mrs. Harris to gossip with the deaf old housekeeper. Oh, when shall we have such another Rector of Laracor! The Tale of a Tub is one of the most masterly compositions in the language, whether for thought, wit, or style. It is so capital and undeniable a proof of the author's talents, that Dr. Johnson, who did not like Swift, would not allow that he wrote it. It is hard that the same performance should stand in the way of a man's promotion to a bishopric, as wanting gravity, and at the same time be denied to be his, as having too much wit. It is a pity the Doctor did not find out some graver author, for whom he felt a critical kindness, on whom to father this splendid but unacknowledged production. Dr. Johnson could not deny that Gulliver's Travels were his; he therefore disputed their merits, and said that after the first idea of them was conceived, they were easy to execute; all the rest followed mechanically. I do not know how that may be; but the mechanism employed is something very different from any that the author of Rasselas was in the habit of bringing to bear on such occasions. There is nothing more futile, as well as invidious, than this mode of criticising a work of original genius. Its greatest merit is supposed to be in the invention; and you say very

wisely, that it is not *in the execution.* You might as well take away the merit of the invention of the telescope by saying that, after its uses were explained and understood, any ordinary eyesight could look through it. Whether the excellence of Gulliver's Travels is in the conception or the execution, is of little consequence; the power is somewhere, and it is a power that has moved the world. The power is not that of big words and vaunting commonplaces. Swift left these to those who wanted them, and has done what his acuteness and intensity of mind alone could enable any one to conceive or to perform. His object was to strip empty pride and grandeur of the imposing air which external circumstances throw around them; and for this purpose he has cheated the imagination of the illusions which the prejudices of sense and of the world put upon it, by reducing everything to the abstract predicament of size. He enlarges or diminishes the scale, as he wishes to show the insignificance or the grossness of our overweening self-love. That he has done this with mathematical precision, with complete presence of mind and perfect keeping, in a manner that comes equally home to the understanding of the man and of the child, does not take away from the merit of the work or the genius of the author. He has taken a new view of human nature, such as a being of a higher sphere might take of it; he has torn the scales from off his moral vision; he has tried an experiment upon human life, and sifted its pretensions from the alloy of circumstances; he has measured it with a rule, has weighed it in a balance, and found it, for the most part, wanting and worthless—in substance and in show. Nothing solid, nothing valuable is left in his system but virtue and wisdom. What a libel is this upon mankind! What a convincing proof of misanthropy! What presumption and what *malice prepense*, to show men what they are, and to teach them what they ought to be! What a mortifying stroke aimed at national glory is that

unlucky incident of Gulliver's wading across the channel and carrying off the whole fleet of Blefuscu! After that, we have only to consider which of the contending parties was in the right. What a shock to personal vanity is given in the account of Gulliver's nurse, Glumdalclitch! Still, notwithstanding the disparagement to her personal charms, her good nature remains the same amiable quality as before. I cannot see the harm, the misanthropy, the immoral and degrading tendency of this. The moral lesson is as fine as the intellectual exhibition is amusing. It is an attempt to tear off the mask of imposture from the world; and nothing but imposture has a right to complain of it. It is, indeed, the way with our quacks in morality to preach up the dignity of human nature, to pamper pride and hypocrisy with the idle mockeries of the virtues they pretend to, and which they have not; but it was not Swift's way to cant morality or anything else; nor did his genius prompt him to write unmeaning panegyrics on mankind!

I do not, therefore, agree with the estimate of Swift's moral or intellectual character given by an eminent critic, who does not seem to have forgotten the party politics of Swift. I do not carry my political resentments so far back: I can at this time of day forgive Swift for being a Tory. I feel little disturbance (whatever I might think of them) at his political sentiments which died with him, considering how much else he has left behind him of a more solid and imperishable nature! If he had, indeed (like some others), merely left behind him the lasting infamy of a destroyer of his country, or the shining example of an apostate from liberty, I might have thought the case altered.

The determination with which Swift persisted in a preconcerted theory savoured of the morbid affection of which he died. There is nothing more likely to drive a man mad than the being unable to get rid of the idea of the distinction between right and wrong, and an obstinate, constitutional preference of the true to the agreeable.

Swift was not a Frenchman. In this respect he differed from Rabelais and Voltaire. They have been accounted the three greatest wits in modern times; but their wit was of a peculiar kind in each. They are little beholden to each other; there is some resemblance between Lord Peter in the Tale of a Tub and Rabelais' Friar John; but in general they are all three authors of a substantive character in themselves. Swift's wit (particularly in his chief prose works) was serious, saturnine, and practical; Rabelais' was fantastical and joyous; Voltaire's was light, sportive, and verbal. Swift's wit was the wit of sense; Rabelais', the wit of nonsense; Voltaire's, of indifference to both. The ludicrous in Swift arises out of his keen sense of impropriety, his soreness and impatience of the least absurdity. He separates with a severe and caustic air truth from falsehood, folly from wisdom, "shows vice her own image, scorn her own feature;" and it is the force, the precision, and the honest abruptness with which the separation is made, that excites our surprise, our admiration, and laughter. He sets a mark of reprobation on that which offends good sense and good manners, which cannot be mistaken, and which holds it up to our ridicule and contempt ever after. His occasional disposition to trifling (already noticed) was a relaxation from the excessive earnestness of his mind. *Indignatio facit versus.* His better genius was his spleen. It was the biting acrimony of his temper that sharpened his other faculties. The truth of his perceptions produced the pointed coruscations of his wit; his playful irony was the result of inward bitterness of thought; his imagination was the product of the literal, dry, incorrigible tenaciousness of his understanding. He endeavoured to escape from the persecution of realities into the regions of fancy, and invented his Liliputians and Brobdignagians, Yahoos and Houynhyms, as a diversion to the more painful knowledge of the world around him: *they* only made him laugh, while men and women

made him angry. His feverish impatience made him view the infirmities of that great baby, the world, with the same scrutinising glance and jealous irritability that a parent regards the failings of its offspring; but, as Rousseau has well observed, parents have not on this account been supposed to have more affection for other people's children than their own. In other respects, and except from the sparkling effervescence of his gall, Swift's brain was as "dry as the remainder biscuit after a voyage." He hated absurdity: Rabelais loved it, exaggerated it with supreme satisfaction, luxuriated in its endless varieties, rioted in nonsense, "reigned there and revelled." He dwelt on the absurd and ridiculous for the pleasure they gave him, not for the pain. He lived upon laughter, and died laughing. He indulged his vein, and took his full swing of folly. He did not baulk his fancy or his readers. His wit was to him "as riches fineless;" he saw no end of his wealth in that way, and set no limits to his extravagance: he was communicative, prodigal, boundless, and inexhaustible. His were the Saturnalia of wit, the riches and the royalty, the health and long life. He is intoxicated with gaiety, mad with folly. His animal spirits drown him in a flood of mirth: his blood courses up and down his veins like wine. His thirst of enjoyment is as great as his thirst of drink: his appetite for good things of all sorts is unsatisfied, and there is a never-ending supply. *Discourse is dry;* so they moisten their words in their cups, and relish their dry jests with plenty of Botargos and dried neats' tongues. It is like Camacho's wedding in Don Quixote, where Sancho ladled out whole pullets and fat geese from the soup-kettles at a pull. The flagons are set * a running, their tongues wag at the same time, and their mirth flows as a river. How Friar John roars and lays about him in the vineyard! How Panurge whines in the storm, and how dexterously he contrives to throw the sheep overboard!

* Orig., edit. has *setting*.—Ed

How much Pantagruel behaves like a wise king! How Gargantua mewls, and pules, and slabbers his nurse, and demeans himself most like a royal infant! what provinces he devours! what seas he drinks up! How he eats, drinks, and sleeps —sleeps, eats, and drinks! The style of Rabelais is no less prodigious than his matter. His words are of marrow—unctuous, dropping fatness. He was a mad wag, the king of good fellows, and prince of practical philosophers!

Rabelais was a Frenchman of the old school, Voltaire of the new. The wit of the one arose from an exuberance of enjoyment, of the other, from an excess of indifference, real or assumed. Voltaire had no enthusiasm for one thing or another: he made light of everything. In his hands all things turn to chaff and dross, as the pieces of silver money in the Arabian Nights were changed by the hands of the enchanter into little dry crumbling leaves! He is a Parisian. He never exaggerates, is never violent: he treats things with the most provoking *sang froid*, and expresses his contempt by the most indirect hints and in the fewest words, as if he hardly thought them worth even his contempt. He retains complete possession of himself and of his subject. He does not effect his purpose by the eagerness of his blows, but by the delicacy of his tact. The poisoned wound he inflicted was so fine, as scarcely to be felt till it rankled and festered in its "mortal consequences." His callousness was an excellent foil for the antagonists he had mostly to deal with. He took knaves and fools on his shield well. He stole away its cloak from grave imposture. If he reduced other things below their true value, making them seem worthless and hollow, he did not degrade the pretensions of tyranny and superstition below their true value, by making them seem utterly worthless and hollow, as contemptible as they were odious. This was the service he rendered to truth and mankind! His *Candide* is a masterpiece of wit. It has been called

"the dull product of a scoffer's pen." It is, indeed, "the product of a scoffer's pen;" but after reading the Excursion, few people will think it *dull*. It is in the most perfect keeping, and without any appearance of effort. Every sentence tells, and the whole reads like one sentence. There is something sublime in Martin's sceptical indifference to moral good and evil. It is the repose of the grave. It is better to suffer this living death, than a living martyrdom. "Nothing can touch him further." The moral of Candide (such as it is) is the same as that of Rasselas: the execution is different. Voltaire says, "A great book is a great evil." Dr. Johnson would have laboured this short apophthegm into a voluminous commonplace. Voltaire's traveller (in another work) being asked "whether he likes black or white mutton best," replies that "he is indifferent, provided it is tender." Dr. Johnson did not get at a conclusion by so short a way as this. If Voltaire's licentiousness is objected to me, I say, let it be placed to its true account, the manners of the age and court in which he lived. The lords and ladies of the bedchamber in the reign of Louis XV. found no fault with the immoral tendency of his writings. Why then should our modern *purists* quarrel with them? But to return.

Young is a gloomy epigrammatist. He has abused great powers both of thought and language. His moral reflections are sometimes excellent; but he spoils their beauty by overloading them with a religious horror, and at the same time giving them all the smart turns and quaint expression of an enigma or repartee in verse. The well-known lines on Procrastination are in his best manner:

> "Be wise to-day; 'tis madness to defer;
> Next day the fatal precedent will plead;
> Thus on, till wisdom is push'd out of life.
> Procrastination is the thief of time;
> Year after year it steals, till all are fled,
> And to the mercies of a moment leaves
> The vast concerns of an eternal scene.

Of man's miraculous mistakes, this bears
The palm, "That all men are about to live,"
For ever on the brink of being born.
All pay themselves the compliment to think
They, one day, shall not drivel; and their pride
On this reversion takes up ready praise;
At least, their own; their future selves applauds;
How excellent that life they ne'er will lead!
Time lodg'd in their own hands in Folly's vails:
That lodg'd in Fate's, to Wisdom they consign;
The thing they can't but purpose, they postpone.
'Tis not in Folly, not to scorn a fool;
And scarce in human Wisdom to do more.
All Promise is poor dilatory man,
And that through every stage. When young, indeed,
In full content we sometimes nobly rest,
Un-anxious for ourselves; and only wish,
As duteous sons, our fathers were more wise.
At thirty man suspects himself a fool;
Knows it at forty, and reforms his plan;
At fifty chides his infamous delay,
Pushes his prudent purpose to Resolve;
In all the magnanimity of thought
Resolves, and re-resolves; then dies the same.

And why? Because he thinks himself immortal.
All men think all men mortal, but themselves:
Themselves, when some alarming shock of fate
Strikes through their wounded hearts the sudden dread:
But their hearts wounded, like the wounded air,
Soon close; where passed the shaft, no trace is found.
As from the wing no scar the sky retains;
The parted wave no furrow from the keel;
So dies in human hearts the thought of death.
Ev'n with the tender tear which nature sheds
O'er those we love; we drop it in their grave."

His Universal Passion is a keen and powerful satire, but the effort takes from the effect, and oppresses attention by perpetual and violent demands upon it. His tragedy of the Revenge is monkish and scholastic. Zanga is a vulgar caricature of Iago. The finest lines in it are the burst of triumph at the end, when his revenge is completed:

> "Let Europe and her pallid sons go weep,
> Let Afric on her hundred thrones rejoice," &c.

Collins is a writer of a very different stamp, who had perhaps less general power of mind than Young; but he had that true *vivida vis*, that genuine inspiration, which alone can give birth to the highest efforts of poetry. He leaves stings in the minds of his readers, certain traces of thought and feelings which never wear out, because nature had left them in his own mind. He is the only one of the minor poets of whom, if he had lived, it cannot be said that he might not have done the greatest things. The germ is there. He is sometimes affected, unmeaning, and obscure; but he also catches rich glimpses of the bowers of Paradise, and has lofty aspirations after the highest seats of the Muses. With a great deal of tinsel and splendid patchwork, he has not been able to hide the solid sterling ore of genius. In his best works there is an attic simplicity, a pathos, and fervour of imagination, which make us the more lament that the efforts of his mind were at first depressed by neglect and pecuniary embarrassment, and at length buried in the gloom of an unconquerable and fatal malady. How many poets have gone through all the horrors of poverty and contempt, and ended their days in moping melancholy or moody madness!

> "We poets in our youth begin in gladness,
> But thereof comes in the end despondency and madness."

Is this the fault of themselves, of nature in tempering them of too fine a clay, or of the world, that spurner of living, and patron of dead merit? Read the account of Collins: with hopes frustrated, with faculties blighted—at last, when it was too late for himself or others, receiving the deceitful favours of relenting Fortune, which served only to throw their sunshine on his decay, and to light him to an early grave. He was found sitting with every spark of imagination extinguished, and with only the faint

traces of memory and reason left—with only one book in his room, the Bible; "but that," he said, "was the best." A melancholy damp hung like an unwholesome mildew upon his faculties: a canker had consumed the flower of his life. He produced works of genius, and the public regarded them with scorn: he aimed at excellence that should be his own, and his friends treated his efforts as the wanderings of fatuity. The proofs of his capacity are, his Ode on Evening, his Ode on the Passions (particularly the fine personification of Hope), his Ode to Fear, the [so called] Dirge in Cymbeline, the Lines on Thomson's Grave, and his Eclogues, parts of which are admirable. But perhaps his Ode on the Poetical Character is the best of all. A rich distilled perfume emanates from it like the breath of genius; a golden cloud envelops it; a honeyed paste of poetic diction encrusts it, like the candied coat of the auricula. His Ode to Evening shows equal genius in the images and versification. The sounds steal slowly over the ear, like the gradual coming on of evening itself:

"If aught of oaten stop or pastoral song
May hope, chaste Eve, to soothe thy modest ear,
Like thy own solemn springs,
Thy springs and dying gales,

O nymph reserv'd, while now the bright-haired sun
Sits on yon western tent, whose cloudy skirts
With brede ethereal wove,
O'erhang his wavy bed:

Now air is hush'd, save where the weak-ey'd bat
With short shrill shriek flits by on leathern wing,
Or where the beetle winds
His small but sullen horn,

As oft he rises m'dst the twilight path,
Against the pilgrim borne in heedless hum.
Now teach me, maid compos'd,
To breathe some soften'd strain,

Whose numbers stealing through thy darkling vale
May not unseemly with its stillness suit,
As musing slow, I hail
Thy genial, lov'd return!

For when thy folding star arising shows
His paly circlet, at his warning lamp
The fragrant Hours and Elves
Who slept in flow'rs the day,

And many a nymph who wreathes her brows with sedge,
And sheds the fresh'ning dew, and lovelier still,
The pensive Pleasures sweet
Prepare thy shadowy car;

Then lead, calm Votress, where some sheety lake
Cheers the lone heath, or some time-hallow'd pile,
Or upland fallows grey
Reflect its last cool gleam.

But when chill blust'ring winds, or driving rain
Forbid my willing feet, be mine the hut,
That from the mountain's side
Views wilds and swelling floods,

And hamlets brown, and dim-discover'd spires,
And hears their simple bell, and marks o'er all
The dewy fingers draw
The gradual dusky veil.

While Spring shall pour his show'rs, as oft he wont,
And bathe thy breathing tresses, meekest Eve!
While Summer loves to sport
Beneath thy lingering light;

While sallow Autumn fills thy lap with leaves;
Or Winter yelling through the troublous air,
Affrights thy shrinking train
And rudely rends thy robes;

So long, sure-found beneath the sylvan shed,
Shall Fancy, Friendship, Science, rose-lipp'd Health,
Thy gentle influence own,
And hymn thy favourite name."

Hammond, whose poems are bound up with Collins's, in Bell's pocket edition, was a young gentleman, who

appears to have fallen in love about the year 1740, and who translated Tibullus into English verse, to let his mistress and the public know of it.

I should conceive that Collins had a much greater poetical genius than Gray: he had more of that fine madness which is inseparable from it, of its turbid effervescence, of all that pushes it to the verge of agony or rapture. Gray's Pindaric Odes are, I believe, generally given up at present: they are stately and pedantic, a kind of methodical borrowed phrenzy. But I cannot so easily give up, nor will the world be in any haste to part with his Elegy in a Country Churchyard: it is one of the most classical productions that ever was penned by a refined and thoughtful mind, moralising on human life. Mr. Coleridge (in his Literary Life) says that his friend Mr. Wordsworth had undertaken to show that the language of the Elegy is unintelligible: it has, however, been understood! The Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College is more mechanical and commonplace; but it touches on certain strings about the heart, that vibrate in unison with it to our latest breath. No one ever passes by Windsor's "stately heights," or sees the distant spires of Eton College below, without thinking of Gray. He deserves that we should think of him; for he thought of others, and turned a trembling, ever-watchful ear to "the still sad music of humanity." His Letters are inimitably fine. If his poems are sometimes finical and pedantic, his prose is quite free from affectation. He pours his thoughts out upon paper as they arise in his mind; and they arise in his mind without pretence or constraint, from the pure impulse of learned leisure and contemplative indolence. He is not here on stilts or in buckram, but smiles in his easy chair, as he moralises through the loopholes of retreat, on the bustle and raree-show of the world, or on "those reverend bedlams, colleges and schools!" He had nothing to do but to read and to

think, and to tell his friends what he read and thought. His life was a luxurious, thoughtful dream. "Be mine," he says in one of his Letters, "to read eternal new romances of Marivaux and Crebillon." And in another, to show his contempt for action and the turmoils of ambition, he says to some one, "Don't you remember Lords —— and ——, who are now great statesmen, little dirty boys playing at cricket? For my part, I do not feel a bit wiser, or bigger, or older than I did then." What an equivalent for not being wise or great, to be always young! What a happiness never to lose or gain anything in the game of human life, by being never anything more than a looker-on!

How different from Shenstone, who only wanted to be looked at—who withdrew from the world to be followed by the crowd, and courted popularity by affecting privacy! His Letters show him to have lived in a continual fever of petty vanity, and to have been a finished literary coquet. He seems always to say, "You will find nothing in the world so amiable as Nature and me: come, and admire us." His poems are indifferent and tasteless, except his Pastoral Ballad, his Lines on Jemmy Dawson, and his Schoolmistress, which last is a perfect piece of writing.

Akenside had in him the materials of poetry, but he was hardly a great poet. He improved his Pleasures of the Imagination in the subsequent editions, by pruning away a great many redundances of style and ornament. Armstrong is better, though he has not chosen a very exhilarating subject—The Art of Preserving Health. Churchill's Satires on the Scotch, and Characters of the Players, are as good as the subjects deserved—they are strong, coarse, and full of an air of hardened assurance. I ought not to pass over without mention Green's Poem on the Spleen,* or Dyer's Grongar Hill.

The principal name of the period we are now come to

* "The Spleen," by Matthew Green, 1796, 8vo.—Ed.

is that of Goldsmith, than which few names stand higher or fairer in the annals of modern literature. One should have his own pen to describe him as he ought to be described: amiable, various, and bland, with careless inimitable grace touching on every kind of excellence: with manners unstudied, but a gentle heart: performing miracles of skill from pure happiness of nature, and whose greatest fault was ignorance of his own worth. As a poet, he is the most flowing and elegant of our versifiers since Pope, with traits of artless nature which Pope had not, and with a peculiar felicity in his turns upon words, which he constantly repeated with delightful effect, such as:

"—— His lot, though small,
He sees that little lot, the lot of all."
* * * * * *
"And turn'd and look'd, and turn'd to look again."

As a novelist, his Vicar of Wakefield has charmed all Europe. What reader is there in the civilised world who is not the better for the story of the washes which the worthy Dr. Primrose demolished so deliberately with the poker—for the knowledge of the guinea which the Miss Primroses kept unchanged in their pockets—the adventure of the picture of the Vicar's family, which could not be got into the house—and that of the Flamborough family, all painted with oranges in their hands—or for the story of the case of shagreen spectacles and the cosmogony?

As a comic writer, his Tony Lumpkin draws forth new powers from Mr. Liston's face. That alone is praise enough for it. Poor Goldsmith! how happy he has made others! how unhappy he was in himself! He never had the pleasure of reading his own works! He had only the satisfaction of good-naturedly relieving the necessities of others, and the consolation of being harassed to death with his own! He is the most amusing and interesting person in one of the most amusing and interesting books

in the world, Boswell's Life of Johnson. His peach-coloured coat shall always bloom in Boswell's writings, and his fame survive in his own! His genius was a mixture of originality and imitation: he could do nothing without some model before him, and he could copy nothing that he did not adorn with the graces of his own mind. Almost all the latter part of the Vicar of Wakefield, and a great deal of the former, is taken from Joseph Andrews; but the circumstances I have mentioned above are not.

The finest things he has left behind him in verse are his character of a country schoolmaster, and that prophetic description of Burke in the Retaliation. His moral Essays in the Citizen of the World are as agreeable chit-chat as can be conveyed in the form of didactic discourses.

Warton was a poet and a scholar, studious with ease, learned without affectation. He had a happiness which some have been prouder of than he, who deserved it less—he was poet-laureate:

> "And that green wreath which decks the bard when dead,
> That laurel garland crown'd his living head."

But he bore his honours meekly, and performed his half-yearly task regularly. I should not have mentioned him for this distinction alone (the highest which a poet can receive from the state), but for another circumstance: I mean his being the author of some of the finest sonnets in the language—at least so they appear to me; and as this species of composition has the necessary advantage of being short (though it is also sometimes both "tedious and brief"), I will here repeat two or three of them, as treating pleasing subjects in a pleasing and philosophical way:

Written in a blank leaf of Dugdale's Monasticon.

> "Deem not, devoid of elegance, the sage,
> By Fancy's genuine feelings unbeguil'd,
> Of painful pedantry the poring child;
> Who turns of these proud domes the historic page,

Now sunk by Time, and Henry's fiercer rage.
Think'st thou the warbling Muses never smil'd
On his lone hours? Ingenuous views engage
His thoughts, on themes unclassic falsely styl'd,
Intent. While cloister'd piety displays
Her mouldering roll, the piercing eye explores
New manners, and the pomp of elder days,
Whence culls the pensive bard his pictur'd stores.
Not rough nor barren are the winding ways
Of hoar Antiquity, but strewn with flowers."

Sonnet. Written at Stonehenge.

"Thou noblest monument of Albion's isle,
Whether, by Merlin's aid, from Scythia's shore
To Amber's fatal plain Pendragon bore,
Huge frame of giant hands, the mighty pile,
T' entomb his Britons slain by Hengist's guile:
Or Druid priests, sprinkled with human gore,
Taught 'mid thy massy maze their mystic lore:
Or Danish chiefs, enrich'd with savage spoil,
To victory's idol vast, an unhewn shrine,
Rear'd the rude heap, or in thy hallow'd ground
Repose the kings of Brutus' genuine line;
Or here those kings in solemn state were crown'd;
Studious to trace thy wondrous origin,
We muse on many an ancient tale renown'd."

Nothing can be more admirable than the learning here displayed, or the inference from it, that it is of no use but as it leads to interesting thought and reflection.

That written after seeing Wilton House is in the same style, but I prefer concluding with that to the river Lodon, which has a personal as well as poetical interest about it:

"Ah! what a weary race my feet have run,
Since first I trod thy banks with alders crown'd,
And thought my way was all through fairy ground,
Beneath the azure sky and golden sun:
When first my Muse to lisp her notes begun,
While pensive memory traces back the round
Which fills the varied interval between;
Much pleasure, more of sorrow, marks the scene.—

> Sweet native stream! those skies and suns so pure
> No more return, to cheer my evening road!
> Yet still one joy remains, that not obscure
> Nor useless, all my vacant days have flow'd
> From youth's gay dawn to manhood's prime mature,
> Nor with the Muse's laurel unbestow'd."

I have thus gone through all the names of this period I could think of, but I find that there are others still waiting behind that I had never thought of. Here is a list of some of them—Pattison, Tickell, Hill, Somerville, Browne, Pitt, Wilkie, Dodsley, Shaw, Smart, Langhorne, Bruce, Greame, Glover, Lovibond, Penrose, Mickle, Jago, Scott, Whitehead, Jenyns, Logan, Cotton, Cunningham, and Blacklock.—I think it will be best to let them pass and say nothing about them. It will be hard to persuade so many respectable persons that they are dull writers, and if we give them any praise, they will send others.

But here comes one whose claims cannot be so easily set aside: they have been sanctioned by learning, hailed by genius, and hallowed by misfortune—I mean Chatterton. Yet I must say what I think of him, and that is not what is generally thought. I pass over the disputes between the learned antiquaries, Dr. Milles, Herbert Croft, and Dr. Knox, whether he was to be placed after Shakspeare and Dryden, or to come after Shakspeare alone. A living poet has borne a better testimony to him:

> "I thought of Chatterton, the marvellous boy,
> The sleepless soul that perished in his pride
> And him* who walked in glory and in joy
> Beside his plough along the mountain side."

I am loth to put asunder whom so great an authority has joined together; but I cannot find in Chatterton's works anything so extraordinary as the age at which they were written. They have a facility, vigour, and knowledge,

* Burns.—These lines are taken from the introduction to Mr. Wordsworth's poem of the LEECH-GATHERER.

which were prodigious in a boy of sixteen, but which would not have been so in a man of twenty. He did not show extraordinary powers of genius, but extraordinary precocity. Nor do I believe he would have written better, had he lived. He knew this himself, or he would have lived. Great geniuses, like great kings, have too much to think of to kill themselves; for their mind to them also "a kingdom is." With an unaccountable power coming over him at an unusual age, and with the youthful confidence it inspired, he performed wonders, and was willing to set a seal on his reputation by a tragic catastrophe. He had done his best; and, like another Empedocles, threw himself into Ætna, to ensure immortality. The brazen slippers alone remain!

LECTURE VII.

CHATTERTON (*continued*).—ON BURNS, AND THE OLD ENGLISH BALLADS.

I AM sorry that what I said in the conclusion of the last Lecture respecting Chatterton, should have given dissatisfaction to some persons, with whom I would willingly agree on all such matters. What I meant was less to call in question Chatterton's genius, than to object to the common mode of estimating its magnitude by its prematureness. The lists of fame are not filled with the dates of births or deaths; and the side-mark of the age at which they were done, wears out in works destined for immortality. Had Chatterton really done more, we should have thought less of him, for our attention would then have been fixed on the excellence of the works themselves, instead of the singularity of the circumstances in which they were produced. But because he attained to the full powers of manhood at an early age, I do not see that he would have attained to more than those powers, had he lived to be a man. He was a prodigy, because in him the ordinary march of nature was violently precipitated; and it is therefore inferred, that he would have continued to hold on his course, "unslacked of motion." On the contrary, who knows but he might have lived to be poet-laureate? It is much better to let him remain as he was. Of his actual productions, any one may think as highly as he pleases; I would only guard against adding to the account of his *quantum meruit*, those possible productions by which the learned rhapsodists of his time raised his gigantic pretensions to an equality with those of Homer and Shakspeare. It is amusing to read some of these

exaggerated descriptions, each rising above the other in extravagance. In Anderson's Life, we find that Mr. Warton speaks of him "as a prodigy of genius," as "a singular instance of prematurity of abilities:" that may be true enough, and Warton was at any rate a competent judge; but Mr. Malone "believes him to have been the greatest genius that England has produced since the days of Shakspeare." Dr. Gregory says "he must rank, as a universal genius, above Dryden, and perhaps only second to Shakspeare." Mr. Herbert Croft is still more unqualified in his praises; he asserts, that "no such being, at any period of life, has ever been known, or possibly ever will be known." He runs a parallel between Chatterton and Milton; and asserts, that "an army of Macedonian and Swedish mad butchers fly before him;" meaning, I suppose, that Alexander the Great and Charles the Twelfth were nothing to him; "nor," he adds, "does my memory supply me with any human being, who at such an age, with such advantages, has produced such compositions. Under the heathen mythology, superstition and admiration would have explained all, by bringing Apollo on earth; nor would the God ever have descended with more credit to himself." Chatterton's physiognomy would at least have enabled him to pass *incognito*. It is quite different from the look of timid wonder and delight with which Annibal Caracci has painted a young Apollo listening to the first sounds he draws from a Pan's pipe under the tutelage of the old Silenus! If Mr. Croft is sublime on the occasion, Dr. Knox is no less pathetic. "The testimony of Dr. Knox," says Dr. Anderson,* "does equal credit to the classical taste and amiable benevolence of the writer, and the genius and reputation of Chatterton." "When I read," says the Doctor, "the researches of those learned antiquaries who have endeavoured to prove that the poems attributed to Rowley were really written by him, I observe

* Essays, p. 144.

many ingenious remarks in confirmation of their opinion, which it would be tedious, if not difficult, to controvert."

Now this is so far from the mark, that the whole controversy might have been settled by any one but the learned antiquaries themselves, who had the smallest share of their learning, from this single circumstance, that the poems read as smooth as any modern poems, if you read them as modern compositions; and that you cannot read them, or make verse of them at all, if you pronounce or accent the words as they were spoken at the time when the poems were pretended to have been written. The whole secret of the imposture, which nothing but a deal of learned dust, raised by collecting and removing a great deal of learned rubbish, could have prevented our laborious critics from seeing through, lies on the face of it (to say nothing of the burlesque air which is scarcely disguised throughout) in the repetition of a few obsolete words, and in the misspelling of common ones.

"No sooner," proceeds the Doctor, "do I turn to the poems, than the labour of the antiquaries appears only waste of time; and I am involuntarily forced to join in placing that laurel, which he seems so well to have deserved, on the brow of Chatterton. The poems bear so many marks of superior genius, that they have deservedly excited the general attention of polite scholars, and are considered as the most remarkable productions in modern poetry. We have many instances of poetical eminence at an early age; but neither Cowley, Milton, nor Pope ever produced anything while they were boys which can justly be compared to the poems of Chatterton. The learned antiquaries do not indeed dispute their excellence. They extol it in the highest terms of applause. They raise their favourite Rowley to a rivalry with Homer: but they make the very merits of the works an argument against their real author. Is it possible, say they, that a boy should produce compositions so beautiful and masterly? That a

common boy should produce them is not possible," rejoins the Doctor; "but that they should be produced by a boy of an extraordinary genius, such as was that of Homer or Shakspeare, though a prodigy, is such a one as by no means exceeds the bounds of rational credibility."

Now it does not appear that Shakspeare or Homer were such early prodigies; so that by this reasoning he must take precedence of them too, as well as of Milton, Cowley, and Pope. The reverend and classical writer then breaks out into the following melancholy raptures:

"Unfortunate boy! short and evil were thy days, but thy fame shall be immortal. Hadst thou been known to the munificent patrons of genius . . . . . .

"Unfortunate boy! poorly wast thou accommodated during thy short sojourning here among us; rudely wast thou treated; sorely did thy feelings suffer from the scorn of the unworthy; and there are at last those who wish to rob thee of thy only meed, thy posthumous glory. Severe too are the censures of thy morals. In the gloomy moments of despondency, I fear thou hast uttered impious and blasphemous thoughts. But let thy more rigid censors reflect, that thou wast literally and strictly but a boy. Let many of thy bitterest enemies reflect what were their own religious principles, and whether they had any at the age of fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen. Surely it is a severe and an unjust surmise that thou wouldst probably have ended thy life as a victim to the laws, if thou hadst not ended it as thou didst."

Enough, enough, of the learned antiquaries, and of the classical and benevolent testimony of Dr. Knox. Chatterton was, indeed, badly enough off; but he was at least saved from the pain and shame of reading this woful lamentation over fallen genius, which circulates splendidly bound in the fourteenth edition, while he is a prey to worms. As to those who are really capable of admiring Chatterton's genius, or of feeling an interest in his fate, I would only

say, that I never heard any one speak of any one of his works as if it were an old well-known favourite, and had become a faith and a religion in his mind. It is his name, his youth, and what he might have lived to have done, that excite our wonder and admiration. He has the same sort of posthumous fame that an actor of the last age has—an abstracted reputation which is independent of anything we know of his works. The admirers of Collins never think of him without recalling to their minds his Ode on Evening or on the Poetical Character. Gray's Elegy and his poetical popularity are identified together, and inseparable even in imagination. It is the same with respect to Burns: when you speak of him as a poet, you mean his works, his Tam o' Shanter, or his Cotter's Saturday Night. But the enthusiasts for Chatterton, if you ask for the proofs of his extraordinary genius, are obliged to turn to the volume, and perhaps find there what they seek; but it is not in their minds; and it is of *that* I spoke. The Minstrel's song in Ælla is I think the best:

"O! synge untoe mie roundelaie,
O! droppe the brynie teare wythe mee,
Daunce ne moe atte hallie daie,
Lycke a rennynge ryver be.
Mie love ys dedde,
Gon to hys death-bedde,
Al under the wyllowe-tree.

Blacke hys cryne as the wyntere nyghte,
Whyte hys rode as the sommer snowe,
Rodde hys face as the mornynge lyghte,
Cale he lyes ynne the grave belowe.
Mie love ys dedde,
Gon to hys deathe-bedde,
Al under the wyllowe-tree.

Swote hys tyngue as the throstles note,
Quycke ynne daunce as thoughte canne bee,
Defte hys taboure, codgelle stote,
O! hee lyes bie the wyllowe-tree.
Mie love ys dedde,
Gonne to hys deathe-bedde,
Alle underre the wyllowe-tree.

Harke! the ravenne flappes hys wynge,
In the briered delle belowe;
Harke! the dethe-owle loude dothe synge,
To the nyghte-mares as heie goe.
Mie love ys dedde,
Gonne to hys deathe-bedde,
Al under the wyllowe-tree.

See! the whyte moone sheenes onne hie:
Whyterre ys mie true loves shroude;
Whyterre yanne the mornynge skie,
Whyterre yanne the evenynge cloude.
Mie love ys dedde,
Gon to hys deathe-bedde,
Al under the wyllowe-tree.

Heere, uponne mie true loves grave,
Schalle the baren fleurs be layde,
Ne one hallie Seyncte to save
Al the celness of a mayde.
Mie love ys dedde,
Gonne to hys deathe-bedde,
Al under the wyllowe-tree.

Wythe mie hondes I'lle dent the brieres
Rounde hys hallie corse to gre,
Ouphante fairie,* lyghte youre fyres,
Heere mie boddie stille schalle bee.
Mie love ys dedde,
Gon to hys deathe-bedde,
Al under the wyllowe-tree.

Comme, wythe acorne-coppe and thorne,
Drayne my hartys blood awaie;
Lyfe and all yttes goode I scorne,
Daunce die nete, or feaste by daie.
Mie love ys dedde,
Gon to hys deathe-bedde,
Al under the wyllowe-tree.

Waterre wytches, crownede wythe reytes,
Bere mee to yer leathalle tyde.
I die; I comme; mie true love waytes.
Thos the damselle spake, and dyed."

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* *Sic* in edit. 4to, 1782, p. 255; but did not Chatterton write *ouf* (oaf) *aut fairie*?

To proceed to the more immediate subject of the present Lecture, the character and writings of Burns. Shakspeare says of some one, that "he was like a man made after supper of a cheese-paring." Burns the poet was not such a man. He had a strong mind, and a strong body, the fellow to it. He had a real heart of flesh and blood beating in his bosom—you can almost hear it throb. Some one said, that if you had shaken hands with him, his hands would have burnt yours. The Gods indeed "made him poetical;" but Nature had a hand in him first. His heart was in the right place. He did not "create a soul under the ribs of death," by tinkling siren sounds, or by piling up centos of poetical diction; but for the artificial flowers of poetry, he plucked the mountain-daisy under his feet; and a field-mouse, hurrying from its ruined dwelling, could inspire him with the sentiments of terror and pity. He held the plough or the pen with the same firm, manly grasp; nor did he cut out poetry as we cut out watch-papers, with finical dexterity, nor from the same flimsy materials. Burns was not like Shakspeare in the range of his genius; but there is something of the same magnanimity, directness, and unaffected character about him. He was not a sickly sentimentalist, a namby-pamby poet, a mincing metre ballad-monger, any more than Shakspeare. He would as soon hear "a brazen candlestick tuned, or a dry wheel grate on the axletree." He was as much of a man, not a twentieth part as much of a poet, as Shakspeare. With but little of his imagination or inventive power, he had the same life of mind: within the narrow circle of personal feeling or domestic incidents, the pulse of his poetry flows as healthily and vigorously. He had an eye to see, a heart to feel:—no more. His pictures of good fellowship, of social glee, of quaint humour, are equal to anything; they come up to nature, and they cannot go beyond it. The sly jest collected in his laughing eye at the sight of the grotesque and ludicrous

in manners; the large tear rolled down his manly cheek at the sight of another's distress. He has made us as well acquainted with himself as it is possible to be, has let out the honest impulses of his native disposition, the unequal conflict of the passions in his breast, with the same frankness and truth of description. His strength is not greater than his weakness: his virtues were greater than his vices. His virtues belonged to his genius: his vices to his situation, which did not correspond to his genius.

It has been usual to attack Burns's moral character and the moral tendency of his writings at the same time; and Mr. Wordsworth, in a letter to Mr. Gray, Master of the High School at Edinburgh, in attempting to defend, has only laid him open to a more serious and unheard-of responsibility. Mr. Gray might well have sent him back, in return for his epistle, the answer of Holofernes in Love's Labour Lost:—"*Via*, goodman Dull, thou hast spoken no word all this while." The author of this performance, which is as weak in effect as it is pompous in pretension, shows a great dislike of Robespierre, Bonaparte, and of Mr. Jeffrey, whom he, by some unaccountable fatality, classes together as the three most formidable enemies of the human race that have appeared in his (Mr. Wordsworth's) remembrance; but he betrays very little liking to Burns. He is indeed anxious to get him out of the unhallowed clutches of the Edinburgh Reviewers (as a mere matter of poetical privilege), only to bring him before a graver and higher tribunal, which is his own, and after repeating and insinuating ponderous charges against him, shakes his head, and declines giving any opinion in so tremendous a case; so that, though the judgment of the former critic is set aside, poor Burns remains just where he was, and nobody gains anything by the cause but Mr. Wordsworth, in an increasing opinion of his own wisdom and purity. "Out upon this half-

faced fellowship!" The author of the Lyrical Ballads has thus missed a fine opportunity of doing Burns justice and himself honour. He might have shown himself a philosophical prose-writer, as well as a philosophical poet. He might have offered as amiable and as gallant a defence of the Muses as my uncle Toby, in the honest simplicity of his heart, did of the army. He might have said at once, instead of making a parcel of wry faces over the matter, that Burns had written Tam o' Shanter, and that that alone was enough; that he could hardly have described the excesses of mad, hairbrained, roaring mirth and convivial indulgence, which are the soul of it, if he himself had not "drunk full ofter of the ton than of the well."—unless "the act and practique part of life had been the mistress of his theorique." Mr. Wordsworth might have quoted such lines as:

> "The landlady and Tam grew gracious,
> Wi' favours secret, sweet, and precious;"—

or:

> "Care, mad to see a man so happy,
> E'en drown'd himself among the nappy;"—

and fairly confessed that he could not have written such lines from a want of proper habits and previous sympathy; and that till some great puritanical genius should arise to do these things equally well without any knowledge of them, the world might forgive Burns the injuries he had done his health and fortune in his poetical apprenticeship to experience, for the pleasure he had afforded them. Instead of this, Mr. Wordsworth hints, that with different personal habits and greater strength of mind, Burns would have written differently, and almost as well as *he* does. He might have taken that line of Gay's —

> "The fly that sips treacle is lost in the sweets"—

and applied it in all its force and pathos to the poetical character. He might have argued that poets are men of

genius, and that a man of genius is not a machine; that they live in a state of intellectual intoxication, and that it is too much to expect them to be distinguished by peculiar *sang froid*, circumspection, and sobriety. Poets are by nature men of stronger imagination and keener sensibilities than others; and it is a contradiction to suppose them at the same time governed only by the cool, dry, calculating dictates of reason and foresight. Mr. Wordsworth might have ascertained the boundaries that part the provinces of reason and imagination: that it is the business of the understanding to exhibit things in their relative proportions and ultimate consequences; of the imagination to insist on their immediate impressions, and to indulge their strongest impulses; but it is the poet's office to pamper the imagination of his readers and his own with the extremes of present ecstasy or agony, to snatch the swift-winged golden minutes, the torturing hour, and to banish the dull, prosaic, monotonous realities of life both from his thoughts and from his practice. Mr. Wordsworth might have shown how it is that all men of genius, or of originality and independence of mind, are liable to practical errors from the very confidence their superiority inspires, which makes them fly in the face of custom and prejudice, always rashly, sometimes unjustly; for, after all, custom and prejudice are not without foundation in truth and reason, and no one individual is a match for the world in power, very few in knowledge. The world may altogether be set down as older and wiser than any single person in it.

Again, our philosophical letter-writer might have enlarged on the temptations to which Burns was exposed from his struggles with fortune and the uncertainty of his fate. He might have shown how a poet, not born to wealth or title, was kept in a constant state of feverish anxiety with respect to his fame and the means of a precarious livelihood: that "from being chilled with poverty,

steeped in contempt, he had passed into the sunshine of fortune, and was lifted to the very pinnacle of public favour;" yet even there could not count on the continuance of success, but was, "like the giddy sailor on the mast, ready with every blast to topple down into the fatal bowels of the deep!" He might have traced his habit of ale-house tippling to the last long precious draught of his favourite usquebaugh which he took in the prospect of bidding farewell for ever to his native land, and his conjugal infidelities to his first disappointment in love, which would not have happened to him if he had been born to a small estate in land, or bred up behind a counter!

Lastly, Mr. Wordsworth might have shown the incompatibility between the Muses and the Excise, which never agreed well together, or met in one seat, till they were unaccountably reconciled on Rydal Mount. He must know (no man better) the distraction created by the opposite calls of business and of fancy, the torment of extents, the plague of receipts laid in order or mislaid, the disagreeableness of exacting penalties or paying the forfeiture; and how all this (together with the broaching of casks and the splashing of beer barrels) must have preyed upon a mind like Burns's, with more than his natural sensibility and none of his acquired firmness.

Mr. Coleridge, alluding to this circumstance of the promotion of the Scottish Bard to be "a gauger of ale-firkins," in a poetical epistle to his friend Charles Lamb, calls upon him in a burst of heartfelt indignation, to gather a wreath of henbane, nettles, and nightshade:

> "——— To twine
> The illustrious brow of Scotch nobility."

If, indeed, Mr. Lamb had undertaken to write a letter in defence of Burns, how different would it have been from this of Mr. Wordsworth's! How much better than I can even imagine it to have been done!

It is hardly reasonable to look for a hearty or genuine defence of Burns from the pen of Mr. Wordsworth; for there is no common link of sympathy between them. Nothing can be more different or hostile than the spirit of their poetry. Mr. Wordsworth's poetry is the poetry of mere sentiment and pensive contemplation: Burns's is a very highly sublimated essence of animal existence. With Burns, "self-love and social are the same":

> "And we'll tak a cup of kindness yet,
> For auld lang syne."

Mr. Wordsworth is "himself alone," a recluse philosopher, or a reluctant spectator of the scenes of many-coloured life: moralising on them, not describing, not entering into them. Robert Burns has exerted all the vigour of his mind, all the happiness of his nature, in exalting the pleasures of wine, of love and good fellowship: but in Mr. Wordsworth there is a total disunion and divorce of the faculties of the mind from those of the body: the banns are forbid, or a separation is austerely pronounced from bed and board—*â mensâ et thoro*. From the Lyrical Ballads it does not appear that men eat or drink, marry or are given in marriage. If we lived by every sentiment that proceeded out of mouths, and not by bread or wine, or if the species were continued like trees (to borrow an expression from the great Sir Thomas Brown), Mr. Wordsworth's poetry would be just as good as ever. It is not so with Burns: he is "famous for the keeping of it up," and in his verse is ever fresh and gay. For this, it seems, he has fallen under the displeasure of the Edinburgh Reviewers and the still more formidable patronage of Mr. Wordsworth's pen:

> "This, this was the unkindest cut of all."

I was going to give some extracts out of this composition in support of what I have said, but I find them too tedious. Indeed (if I may be allowed to speak my whole

mind, under correction), Mr. Wordsworth could not be in any way expected to tolerate or give a favourable interpretation to Burns's constitutional foibles; even his best virtues are not good enough for him. He is repelled and driven back into himself, not less by the worth than by the faults of others. His taste is as exclusive and repugnant as his genius. It is because so few things give him pleasure, that he gives pleasure to so few people. It is not every one who can perceive the sublimity of a daisy, or the pathos to be extracted from a withered thorn!

To proceed from Burns's patrons to his poetry, than which no two things can be more different. His "Twa Dogs" is a very spirited piece of description, both as it respects the animal and human creation, and conveys a very vivid idea of the manners both of high and low life. The burlesque panegyric of the first dog—

> "His locked, lettered, braw brass collar
> Show'd him the gentleman and scholar"—

reminds one of Launce's account of his dog Crab, where he is said, as an instance of his being in the way of promotion, "to have got among three or four gentleman-like dogs under the Duke's table." The "Halloween" is the most striking and picturesque description of local customs and scenery. The Brigs of Ayr, the Address to a Haggis, Scotch Drink, and innumerable others, are, however, full of the same kind of characteristic and comic painting. But his masterpiece in this way is his Tam o' Shanter. I shall give the beginning of it, but I am afraid I shall hardly know when to leave off:

> "When chapman billies leave the street,
> And drouthy neebors, neebors meet,
> As market-days are wearing late,
> And folk begin to tak the gate;
> While we sit bousing at the nappy,
> And gettin' fou and unco happy,
> We think na on the lang Scots miles,
> The mosses, waters, slaps, and stiles,

That lie between us and our hame,
Whare sits our sulky, sullen dame,
Gathering her brows like gathering storm,
Nursing her wrath to keep it warm.

This truth fand honest Tam o' Shanter,
As he frae Ayr ae night did canter;
(Auld Ayr, wham ne'er a town surpasses,
For honest men and bonny lasses.)

O Tam! hadst thou but been sae wise
As ta'en thy ain wife Kate's advice!
She tauld thee weel thou was a skellum,
A blethering, blustering, drunken blellum;
That frae November till October
Ae market-day thou was na sober;
That ilka melder wi' the miller,
Thou sat as long as thou had siller;
That ev'ry naig was ca'd a shoe on,
The smith and thee gat roaring fou on;
That at the Lord's house, ev'n on Sunday,
Thou drank wi' Kirkton Jean till Monday—
She prophesied, that late or soon,
Thou would be found deep drown'd in Doon;
Or catch't wi' warlocks in the mirk
By Alloway's auld haunted kirk.

Ah, gentle dames! it gars me greet,
To think how mony counsels sweet,
How mony lengthened, sage advices,
The husband frae the wife despises!

But to our tale: Ae market night,
Tam had got planted unco right
Fast by an ingle, bleezing finely,
Wi' reaming swats, that drank divinely;
And at his elbow, Souter Johnny,
His ancient, trusty, drouthy crony;
Tam lo'ed him like a vera brither;
They had been fou for weeks thegither.
The night drave on wi' sangs and clatter,
And aye the ale was growing better:
The landlady and Tam grew gracious
Wi' favours secret, sweet, and precious:
The Souter tauld his queerest stories;
The landlord's laugh was ready chorus;

The storm without might rair and rustle,
Tam did not mind the storm a whistle.

Care, mad to see a man sae happy,
E'en drown'd himsel amang the nappy!
As bees flee hame wi' lades o' treasure,
The minutes wing'd their way wi' pleasure:
Kings may be blest, but Tam was glorious,
O'er a' the ills of life victorious!

But pleasures are like poppies spread,
You seize the flow'r—its bloom is shed;
Or like the snowfall in the river,
A moment white—then melts for ever;
Or like the Borealis race,
That flit ere you can point their place;
Or like the rainbow's lovely form,
Evanishing amid the storm.
Nae man can tether time or tide,
The hour approaches, Tam maun ride;
That hour, o' night's black arch the key-stane,
That dreary hour he mounts his beast in,
And sic a night he taks the road in,
As ne'er poor sinner was abroad in.

The wind blew as 'twad blawn its last;
The rattling showers rose on the blast,
The speedy gleams the darkness swallow'd,
Loud, deep, and lang the thunder bellow'd:
That night a child might understand,
The Deil had business on his hand.

Weel mounted on his grey mare, Meg,
A better never lifted leg,
Tam skelpit on thro' dub and mire,
Despising wind, and rain, and fire;
Whiles holding fast his guid blue bonnet;
Whiles crooning o'er some auld Scots sonnet;
Whiles glowering round wi' prudent cares,
Lest bogles catch him unawares;
Kirk-Alloway was drawing nigh,
Where ghaists and houlets nightly cry.

By this time he was cross the ford,
Where in the snaw the chapman smoored;
And past the birks and meikle stane,
Where drunken Charlie brak 's neck-bane;

And through the whins, and by the cairn,
Where hunters fand the murder'd bairn;
And near the thorn, aboon the well,
Where Mungo's mither hang'd hersel.
Before him Doon pours all his floods;
The doubling storm roars through the woods;
The lightnings flash from pole to pole;
Near and more near the thunders roll:
Whan, glimmering through the groaning trees,
Kirk-Alloway seem'd in a bleeze;
Through ilka bore the beams were glancing;
And loud resounded mirth and dancing.

Inspiring bold John Barleycorn!
What dangers thou canst make us scorn!
Wi' tippenny, we fear nae evil,
Wi' usquebae, we'll face the devil!
The swats sae ream'd in Tammie's noddle,
Fair play, he car'd na deils a boddle.
But Maggie stood right sair astonished,
Till by the heel and hand admonished,
She ventured forward on the light,
And, wow! Tam saw an unco sight!
Warlocks and witches in a dance,
Nae cotillon brent new frae France,
But hornpipes, jigs, strathspeys, and reels,
Put life and mettle in their heels.
A winnock-bunker in the east,
There sat auld Nick in shape o' beast;
A towzie tyke, black, grim, and large,
To gie them music was his charge;
He screw'd the pipes, and gart them skirl,
Till roof and rafters a' did dirl.
Coffins stood round like open presses,
That shawed the dead in their last dresses;
And, by some devilish cantrip slight,
Each in its cauld hand held a light—
By which heroic Tam was able
To note upon the haly table,
A murderer's banes in gibbet-airns;
Twa span-lang, wee unchristened bairns;
A thief, new cutted frae a rape,
Wi' his last gasp his gab did gape;
Five tomahawks, wi' bluid red rusted;
Five scimitars, wi' murder crusted;

A garter, which a babe had strangled;
A knife, a father's throat had mangled,
Whom his ain son o' life bereft,
The grey hairs yet stack to the heft;
Wi' mair o' horrible and awfu',
Which e'en to name wad be unlawfu'.

As Tammie glowred, amaz'd and curious,
The mirth and fun grew fast and furious:
The Piper loud and louder blew;
The dancers quick and quicker flew;
They reel'd, they set, they cross'd, they cleekit,
Till ilka Carlin swat and reekit,
And coost her duddies to the wark,
And linket at it in her sark!

Now Tam, O Tam! had they been queans
A' plump and strappin' in their teens;
Their sarks, instead o' creeshie flannen,
Been snaw-white seventeen hunder linen!
Thir breeks o' mine, my only pair,
That ance were plush, o' gude blue hair,
I wad hae gi'en them off my hurdies,
For ae blink o' the bonnie burdies!

But wither'd beldams, auld and droll,
Rigwoodie hags wad spean a foal,
Louping and flinging on a cummock,
I wonder didna turn thy stomach.

But Tam kenned what was what fu' brawlie,
There was ae winsome wench and waly,
That night enlisted in the core,
(Lang after kenned on Carrick shore;
For mony a beast to dead she shot,
And perished mony a bonnie boat,
And shook baith meikle corn and bear,
And kept the country-side in fear.)
Her cutty-sark, o' Paisley harn,
That while a lassie she had worn,
In longitude tho' sorely scanty,
It was her best, and she was vauntie.—
Ah! little kenned thy reverend grannie,
That sark she coft for her wee Nannie,
Wi' twa pund Scots ('twas a' her riches),
Wad ever grac'd a dance o' witches!

But here my Muse her wing maun cour;
Sic flights are far beyond her power:
To sing how Nannie lap and flang
(A souple jad she was and strang),
And how Tam stood like ane bewitched,
And thought his very een enriched;
Even Satan glowred and fidged fu' fain,
And hotched, and blew wi' might and main;
Till first ae caper, syne anither,
Tam tint his reason a' thegither,
And roars out, "Weel done, Cutty Sark!"
And in an instant all was dark;
And scarcely had he Maggie rallied,
When out the hellish legion sallied.

As bees bizz out wi' angry fyke
When plundering herds assail their byke;
As open pussie's mortal foes,
When, pop! she starts before their nose;
As eager rins the market-crowd,
When "Catch the thief!" resounds aloud;
So Maggie runs, the witches follow,
Wi' mony an eldritch screech and hollow.

Ah, Tam! ah, Tam! thou'll get thy fairin'!
In hell they'll roast thee like a herrin'!
In vain thy Kate awaits thy comin'!
Kate soon will be a woefu' woman!
Now, do thy speedy utmost, Meg,
And win the key-stane o' the brig;
There at them thou thy tail may toss,
A running stream they darena cross;
But ere the key-stane she could make,
The fient a tail she had to shake!
For Nannie, far before the rest,
Hard upon noble Maggie prest,
And flew at Tam wi' furious ettle;
But little wist she Maggie's mettle—
Ae spring brought aff her master hale,
But left behind her ain grey tail:
The Carlin claught her by the rump,
And left poor Maggie scarce a stump.

Now, wha this tale o' truth shall read,
Ilk man and mother's son take heed:

Whene'er to drink you are inclined,
Or cutty sarks run in your mind,
Think! ye may buy the joys ower dear;
Remember Tam o' Shanter's mare."*

Burns has given the extremes of licentious eccentricity and convivial enjoyment, in the story of this scapegrace, and of patriarchal simplicity and gravity in describing the old national character of the Scottish peasantry. The Cotter's Saturday Night is a noble and pathetic picture of human manners, mingled with a fine religious awe. It comes over the mind like a slow and solemn strain of music. The soul of the poet aspires from this scene of low-thoughted care, and reposes, in trembling hope, on "the bosom of its Father and its God." Hardly anything can be more touching than the following stanzas, for instance, whether as they describe human interests, or breathe a lofty devotional spirit:

"The toil-worn Cotter frae his labour goes,
This night his weekly moil is at an end,
Collects his spades, his mattocks, and his hoes,
Hoping the morn in ease and rest to spend,
And weary, o'er the moor, his course does hameward bend.

At length his lonely cot appears in view,
Beneath the shelter of an aged tree;
Th' expectant wee-things, toddlin, stacher through
To meet their dad, wi' flichterin noise and glee.
His wee-bit ingle, blinkin bonnily,
His clean hearth-stane, his thriftie wifie's smile,
The lisping infant prattling on his knee,
Does a' his weary kiaugh and care beguile,
And makes him quite forget his labour and his toil.

Belyve, the elder bairns come drapping in,
At service out, amang the farmers roun',
Some ca' the pleugh, some herd, some tentie rin
A cannie errand to a neibor town;
Their eldest hope, their Jenny, woman-grown,
In youthfu' bloom, love sparkling in her e'e,
Comes hame, perhaps, to shew a braw new gown,

* Works of Burns, ed. Chambers, iii. 152–8.—Ed.

Or deposite her sair-won penny-fee,
To help her parents dear, if they in hardship be.

With joy unfeign'd, brothers and sisters meet,
And each for other's weelfare kindly spiers;
The social hours, swift-wing'd, unnoticed fleet;
Each tells the uncos that he sees or hears:
The parents, partial, eye their hopeful years;
Anticipation forward points the view;
The mother, wi' her needle an' her shears,
Gars auld claes look amaist as weel 's the new;
The father mixes a' wi' admonition due.

* * * * * * *

But, hark! a rap comes gently to the door;
Jenny, wha kens the meaning o' the same,
Tells how a neibor lad cam o'er the moor,
To do some errands, and convoy her hame.
The wily mother sees the conscious flame
Sparkle in Jenny's e'e, and flush her cheek;
With heart-struck anxious care, inquires his name,
While Jenny hafflins is afraid to speak;
Weel pleas'd the mother hears it's nae wild, worthless rake.

Wi' kindly welcome, Jenny brings him ben;
A strappin' youth; he taks the mother's eye;
Blythe Jenny sees the visit's no ill ta'en;
The father cracks of horses, pleughs, and kye.
The youngster's artless heart o'erflows wi' joy,
But blate an' lathefu', scarce can weel behave;
The mother, wi' a woman's wiles, can spy
What makes the youth sae bashfu' and sae grave;
Weel pleas'd to think her bairn's respected like the lave.

But now the supper crowns their simple board,
The halesome parritch, chief o' Scotia's food:
The soupe their only hawkie does afford,
That 'yont the hallan snugly chows her cood:
The dame brings forth, in complimental mood,
To grace the lad, her weel-hain'd kebbuck, fell,
An' aft he's prest, an' aft he ca's it guid;
The frugal wifie, garrulous, will tell,
How 'twas a towmond auld, sin' lint was i' the bell.

The cheerfu' supper done, wi' serious face,
They, round the ingle, form a circle wide;
The sire turns o'er, with patriarchal grace,
The big ha'-Bible, ance his father's pride:
His bonnet rev'rently is laid aside,
His lyart haffets wearing thin an' bare;
Those strains that once did sweet in Zion glide,
He wales a portion wi' judicious care;
And "Let us worship God!" he says, with solemn air.

They chant their artless notes in simple guise;
They tune their hearts, by far the noblest aim:
Perhaps Dundee's wild-warbling measures rise,
Or plaintive Martyrs, worthy of the name;
Or noble Elgin beets the heavenward flame,
The sweetest far of Scotia's holy lays:
Compar'd with these, Italian trills are tame;
The tickled ear no heart-felt raptures raise;
Nae unison hae they with our Creator's praise."—

Burns's poetical epistles to his friends are admirable, whether for the touches of satire, the painting of character, or the sincerity of friendship they display. Those to Captain Grose, and to Davie, a brother poet, are among the best:—they are "the true pathos and sublime of human life." His prose-letters are sometimes tinctured with affectation. They seem written by a man who has been admired for his wit, and is expected on all occasions to shine. Those in which he expresses his ideas of natural beauty in reference to Alison's Essay on Taste, and advocates the keeping up the remembrances of old customs and seasons, are the most powerfully written. His English serious odes and moral stanzas are, in general, failures, such as the Lament, Man was made to Mourn, &c., nor do I much admire his "Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled." In this strain of didactic or sentimental moralising, the lines to Glencairn are the most happy and impressive. His imitations of the old humorous ballad style of Ferguson's songs are no whit inferior to the admirable originals, such as "John Anderson, my Joe," and many

more. But of all his productions, the pathetic and serious love-songs which he has left behind him, in the manner of the old ballads, are perhaps those which take the deepest and most lasting hold of the mind. Such are the lines to Mary Morison, and those entitled Jessy:

"Here's a health to ane I lo'e dear—
Here's a health to ane I lo'e dear—
Thou art sweet as the smile when fond lovers meet,
And soft as their parting tear—Jessy!

Altho' thou maun never be mine,
Altho' even hope is denied;
'Tis sweeter for thee despairing,
Than aught in the world beside—Jessy!"

The conclusion of the other is as follows:

"Yestreen, when to the trembling string
The dance gaed through the lighted ha',
To thee my fancy took its wing,
I sat, but neither heard nor saw.
Tho' this was fair, and that was bra',
And yon the toast of a' the town,
I sighed and said among them a',
Ye are na' Mary Morison."

That beginning, "Oh gin my love were a bonny red rose," is a piece of rich and fantastic description. One would think that nothing could surpass these in beauty of expression and in true pathos: and nothing does or can, but some of the old Scotch ballads themselves. There is in them a still more original cast of thought, a more romantic imagery—the thistle's glittering down, the gilliflower on the old garden-wall, the horseman's silver bells, the hawk on its perch: a closer intimacy with nature, a firmer reliance on it, as the only stock of wealth which the mind has to resort to, a more infantine simplicity of manners, a greater strength of affection, hopes longer cherished and longer deferred, sighs that the heart dare hardly heave, and "thoughts that often lie too deep for tears." We

seem to feel that those who wrote and sang them (the early minstrels) lived in the open air, wandering on from place to place with restless feet and thoughts, and lending an ever-open ear to the fearful accidents of war or love, floating on the breath of old tradition or common fame, and moving the strings of their harp with sounds that sank into a nation's heart. How fine an illustration of this is that passage in Don Quixote, where the knight and Sancho, going in search of Dulcinea, inquire their way of the countryman, who was driving his mules to plough before break of day, "singing the ancient ballad of Roncesvalles." Sir Thomas Overbury describes his country girl as still accompanied with fragments of old songs. One of the best and most striking descriptions of the effects of this mixture of national poetry and music is to be found in one of the letters of Archbishop Herring, giving an account of a confirmation tour in the mountains of Wales:

"That pleasure over, our work became very arduous, for we were to mount a rock, and in many places of the road, over natural stairs of stone. I submitted to this, which they told me was but a taste of the country, and to prepare me for worse things to come. However, worse things did not come that morning, for we dined soon after out of our own wallets; and though our inn stood in a place of the most frightful solitude, and the best formed for the habitation of monks (who once possessed it) in the world, yet we made a cheerful meal. The novelty of the thing gave me spirits, and the air gave me appetite much keener than the knife I ate with. We had our music too; for there came in a harper, who soon drew about us a group of figures that Hogarth would have given any price for. The harper was in his true place and attitude; a man and woman stood before him, singing to his instrument wildly, but not disagreeably; a little dirty child was playing with the bottom of the harp; a woman in a sick night-cap hanging over the stairs; a boy with crutches fixed in a staring attention, and a girl carding wool in the chimney, and rocking a cradle with her naked feet, interrupted in her business by the charms of the music; all ragged and dirty, and all silently attentive. These figures gave us a most entertaining picture, and would please you or any man of observa-

tion; and one reflection gave me a particular comfort, that the assembly before us demonstrated, that even here the influential sun warmed poor mortals, and inspired them with love and music."

I could wish that Mr. Wilkie had been recommended to take this group as the subject of his admirable pencil; he has painted a picture of Bathsheba instead.

In speaking of the old Scotch ballads, I need do no more than mention the name of Auld Robin Gray. The effect of reading this old ballad * is as if all our hopes and fears hung upon the last fibre of the heart, and we felt that giving way. What silence, what loneliness, what leisure for grief and despair!

"My father pressed me sair,
Though my mother did na' speak;
But she looked in my face
Till my heart was like to break."

The irksomeness of the situations, the sense of painful dependence, is excessive; and yet the sentiment of deep-rooted, patient affection triumphs over all, and is the only impression that remains. Lady Ann Bothwell's Lament is not, I think, quite equal to the lines beginning—

"O waly, waly, up you bank,
And waly, waly, down you brae,
And waly by your river's side,
Where I and my love was wont to gae.
Waly, waly, gin love be bonny,
A little while when it is new;
But when its auld, it waxes cauld,
And wears awa' like morning dew.

I leant my back unto an aik,
I thought it was a trusty tree;
But first it bow'd, and sine it brake,
And sae did my fause love to me.

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* One of the numerous imitations of the old minstrelsy. This celebrated production is now generally believed to have proceeded from the pen of Lady Ann Barnard.—Ed.

Whan cockle-shells turn siller bells,
And muscles grow on every tree,
Whan frost and snaw sall warm us a',
Then sall my love prove true to me.

Now Arthur seat sall be my bed,
The sheets sall ne'er be fy'l 'd by me:
Saint Anton's well sall be my drink,
Since my true-love has forsaken me.
O Martinmas wind, when wilt thou blaw,
And shake the green leaves aff the tree?
O gentle death, when wilt thou come,
And take a life that wearies me!

'Tis not the frost that freezes fell,
Nor blawing snaw's inclemensey,
'Tis not sic cauld, that makes me cry,
But my love's heart grown cauld to me.
Whan we came in by Glasgow town,
We were a comely sight to see,
My love was cled in the black velvet,
And I myself in cramasie.

But had I wist before I kiss'd,
That love had been sae ill to win;
I'd lock'd my heart in a case of gowd,
And pin'd it with a siller pin.
Oh! if my younge babe were born,
And set upon the nurse's knee,
And I mysel were dead and gone,
For a maid again I'll never be."*

The finest modern imitation of this style is the Braes of Yarrow;† and perhaps the finest subject for a story of the same kind in any modern book, is that told in Turner's History of England, of a Mahometan woman, who having fallen in love with an English merchant, the father of Thomas à Becket, followed him all the way to England, knowing only the word London, and the name of her lover, Gilbert.

But to have done with this, which is rather too serious

* Maidment's *Scottish Songs and Ballads*, 1868, ii. 49.—Ed.

† By William Hamilton of Bangour.—Ed.

a subject. The old English ballads are of a gayer and more lively turn. They are adventurous and romantic; but they relate chiefly to good living and good fellowship, to drinking and hunting scenes. Robin Hood is the chief of these, and he still, in imagination, haunts Sherwood Forest. The archers green glimmer under the waving branches; the print on the grass remains where they have just finished their noontide meal under the green-wood tree; and the echo of their bugle-horn and twanging bows resounds through the tangled mazes of the forest, as the tall slim deer glances startled by:

"The trees in Sherwood Forest are old and good;
The grass beneath them now is dimly green:
Are they deserted all? Is no young mien,
With loose-slung bugle, met within the wood?
No arrow found—foil'd of its antler'd food—
Struck in the oak's rude side?—Is there nought seen
To mark the revelries which there have been,
In the sweet days of merry Robin Hood?

Go there with summer, and with evening—go
In the soft shadows, like some wand'ring man—
And thou shalt far amid the forest know
The archer-men in green, with belt and bow,
Feasting on pheasant, river-fowl, and swan,
With Robin at their head, and Marian."*

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* Sonnet on Sherwood Forest, by J. H. Reynolds, Esq.

LECTURE VIII.

ON THE LIVING POETS [1818.]

"No more of talk where God or Angel guest
With man, as with his friend, familiar us'd
To sit indulgent."———

Genius is the heir of fame; but the hard condition on which the bright reversion must be earned is the loss of life. Fame is the recompense not of the living, but of the dead. The temple of fame stands upon the grave: the flame that burns upon its altars is kindled from the ashes of great men. Fame itself is immortal, but it is not begot till the breath of genius is extinguished. For fame is not popularity, the shout of the multitude, the idle buzz of fashion, the venal puff, the soothing flattery of favour or of friendship; but it is the spirit of a man surviving himself in the minds and thoughts of other men, undying and imperishable. It is the power which the intellect exercises over the intellect, and the lasting homage which is paid to it as such, independently of time and circumstances, purified from partiality and evil-speaking. Fame is the sound which the stream of high thoughts, carried down to future ages, makes as it flows: deep, distant, murmuring evermore like the waters of the mighty ocean. He who has ears truly touched to this music, is in a manner deaf to the voice of popularity. The love of fame differs from mere vanity in this, that the one is immediate and personal, the other ideal and abstracted. It is not the direct and gross homage paid to himself that the lover of true fame seeks or is proud of, but the indirect and pure homage paid to the eternal

forms of truth and beauty as they are reflected in his mind, that gives him confidence and hope. The love of nature is the first thing in the mind of the true poet: the admiration of himself, the last. A man of genius cannot well be a coxcomb; for his mind is too full of other things to be much occupied with his own person. He who is conscious of great powers in himself, has also a high standard of excellence with which to compare his efforts: he appeals also to a test and judge of merit, which is the highest, but which is too remote, grave, and impartial, to flatter his self-love extravagantly, or puff him up with intolerable and vain conceit. This, indeed, is one test of genius and of real greatness of mind, whether a man can wait patiently and calmly for the award of posterity, satisfied with the unwearied exercise of his faculties, retired within the sanctuary of his own thoughts; or whether he is eager to forestal his own immortality, and mortgage it for a newspaper puff. He who thinks much of himself, will be in danger of being forgotten by the rest of the world: he who is always trying to lay violent hands on reputation, will not secure the best and most lasting. If the restless candidate for praise takes no pleasure, no sincere and heartfelt delight, in his works, but as they are admired and applauded by others, what should others see in them to admire or applaud? They cannot be expected to admire them because they are *his*, but for the truth and nature contained in them, which must first be inly felt and copied with severe delight, from the love of truth and nature, before it can ever appear there. Was Raphael, think you, when he painted his pictures of the Virgin and Child in all their inconceivable truth and beauty of expression, thinking most of his subject or of himself? Do you suppose that Titian, when he painted a landscape, was pluming himself on being thought the finest colourist in the world, or making himself so by looking at nature? Do you imagine that

Shakspeare, when he wrote Lear or Othello, was thinking of anything but Lear and Othello? Or that Mr. Kean, when he plays these characters, is thinking of the audience? No: he who would be great in the eyes of others, must first learn to be nothing in his own. The love of fame, as it enters at times into his mind, is only another name for the love of excellence; or it is the ambition to attain the highest excellence, sanctioned by the highest authority, that of time.

Those minds, then, which are the most entitled to expect it, can best put up with the postponement of their claims to lasting fame. They can afford to wait. They are not afraid that truth and nature will ever wear out, will lose their gloss with novelty or their effect with fashion. If their works have the seeds of immortality in them, they will live; if they have not, they care little about them as theirs. They do not complain of the start which others have got of them in the race of everlasting renown, or of the impossibility of attaining the honours which time alone can give, during the term of their natural lives. They know that no applause, however loud and violent, can anticipate or overrule the judgment of posterity; that the opinion of no one individual, nor of any one generation, can have the weight, the authority (to say nothing of the force of sympathy and prejudice), which must belong to that of successive generations. The brightest living reputation cannot be equally imposing to the imagination, with that which is covered and rendered venerable with the hoar of innumerable ages. No modern production can have the same atmosphere of sentiment around it as the remains of classical antiquity. But then our moderns may console themselves with the reflection, that they will be old in their turn, and will either be remembered with still increasing honours, or quite forgotten!

I would speak of the living poets as I have spoken of

the dead (for I think highly of many of them); but I cannot speak of them with the same reverence, because I do not feel it; with the same confidence, because I cannot have the same authority to sanction my opinion. I cannot be absolutely certain that anybody, twenty years hence, will think anything about any of them; but we may be pretty sure that Milton and Shakspeare will be remembered twenty years hence. We are, therefore, not without excuse if we husband our enthusiasm a little, and do not prematurely lay out our whole stock in untried ventures, and what may turn out to be false bottoms. I have myself outlived one generation of favourite poets, the Darwins, the Hayleys, the Sewards. Who reads them now? If, however, I have not the verdict of posterity to bear me out in bestowing the most unqualified praises on their immediate successors, it is also to be remembered, that neither does it warrant me in condemning them. Indeed, it was not my wish to go into this ungrateful part of the subject; but something of the sort is expected from me, and I must run the gauntlet as well as I can. Another circumstance that adds to the difficulty of doing justice to all parties is, that I happen to have had a personal acquaintance with some of these jealous votaries of the Muses; and that is not the likeliest way to imbibe a high opinion of the rest. Poets do not praise one another in the language of hyperbole. I am afraid, therefore, that I labour under a degree of prejudice against some of the most popular poets of the day, from an early habit of deference to the critical opinions of some of the least popular. I cannot say that I ever learnt much about Shakspeare or Milton, Spenser or Chaucer, from these professed guides; for I never heard them say much about them. They were always talking of themselves and one another. Nor am I certain that this sort of personal intercourse with living authors, while it takes away all real relish or freedom of opinion with regard to their

contemporaries, greatly enhances our respect for themselves. Poets are not ideal beings; but have their prose-sides, like the commonest of the people. We often hear persons say, What they would have given to have seen Shakspeare! For my part, I would give a great deal not to have seen him; at least, if he was at all like anybody else that I have ever seen. But why should he? for his works are not! This is, doubtless, one great advantage which the dead have over the living. It is always fortunate for ourselves and others when we are prevented from exchanging admiration for knowledge. The splendid vision that in youth haunts our idea of the poetical character, fades upon acquaintance into the light of common day; as the azure tints that deck the mountain's brow are lost on a nearer approach to them. It is well, according to the moral of one of the Lyrical Ballads, "To leave Yarrow unvisited." But to leave this "face-making," and begin.

I am a great admirer of the female writers of the present day; they appear to me like so many modern Muses. I could be in love with Mrs. Inchbald, romantic with Mrs. Radcliffe, and sarcastic with Madame D'Arblay: but they are novel-writers, and, like Audrey, may "thank the Gods for not having made them poetical." Did any one here ever read Mrs. Leicester's School?* If they have not, I wish they would; there will be just time before the next three volumes of the Tales of My Landlord come out. That is not a school of affectation, but of humanity. No one can think too highly of the work, or highly enough of the author.

The first poetess I can recollect is Mrs. Barbauld, with whose works I became acquainted before those of any other author, male or female, when I was learning to spell words of one syllable in her story-books for children. I

* A series of Tales for Children, by Miss Lamb, assisted by her brother Charles. The first edition appeared in 1808.—Ed.

became acquainted with her poetical works long after in Enfield's Speaker, and remember being much divided in my opinion at that time between her Ode to Spring and Collin's Ode to Evening. I wish I could repay my childish debt of gratitude in terms of appropriate praise. She is a very pretty poetess; and, to my fancy, strews the flowers of poetry most agreeably round the borders of religious controversy. She is a neat and pointed prose-writer. Her Thoughts on the Inconsistency of Human Expectations, is one of the most ingenious and sensible essays in the language. There is the same idea in one of Barrow's Sermons.

Mrs. Hannah More is another celebrated modern poetess, and I believe still living. She has written a great deal which I have never read.

Miss Baillie must make up this trio of female poets. Her tragedies and comedies, one of each to illustrate each of the passions separately from the rest, are heresies in the dramatic art. She is a Unitarian in poetry. With her the passions are, like the French republic, one and indivisible: they are not so in nature, or in Shakspeare. Mr. Southey has, I believe, somewhere expressed an opinion, that the Basil of Miss Baillie is superior to Romeo and Juliet. I shall not stay to contradict him. On the other hand, I prefer her De Montfort, which was condemned on the stage, to some later tragedies, which have been more fortunate—to the Remorse, Bertram, and, lastly, Fazio. There is in the chief character of that play a nerve, a continued unity of interest, a setness of purpose and precision of outline which John Kemble alone was capable of giving; and there is all the grace which women have in writing. In saying that De Montfort was a character which just suited Mr. Kemble, I mean to pay a compliment to both. He was not "a man of no mark or likelihood;" and what he could be supposed to do particularly well, must have a meaning in it. As

to the other tragedies just mentioned, there is no reason why any common actor should not "make mouths in them at the invisible event,"—one as well as another. Having thus expressed my sense of the merits of this authoress, I must add, that her comedy of the Election, performed last summer [1817] at the Lyceum with indifferent success, appears to me the perfection of baby-house theatricals. Everything in it has such a *do-me-good* air, is so insipid and amiable. Virtue seems such a pretty playing at make-believe, and vice is such a naughty word. It is a theory of some French author, that little girls ought not to be suffered to have dolls to play with, to call them *pretty dears*, to admire their black eyes and cherry cheeks, to lament and bewail over them if they fall down and hurt their faces, to praise them when they are good, and scold them when they are naughty. It is a school of affectation: Miss Baillie has profited of it. She treats her grown men and women as little girls treat their dolls, makes moral puppets of them, pulls the wires, and they talk virtue and act vice, according to their cue and the title prefixed to each comedy or tragedy, not from any real passions of their own, or love either of virtue or vice.

The transition from these to Mr. Rogers's Pleasures of Memory is not far: he is a very lady-like poet. He is an elegant, but feeble writer. He wraps up obvious thoughts in a glittering cover of fine words, is full of enigmas with no meaning to them, is studiously inverted and scrupulously far-fetched; and his verses are poetry, chiefly because no particle, line, or syllable of them reads like prose. He differs from Milton in this respect, who is accused of having inserted a number of prosaic lines in Paradise Lost. This kind of poetry, which is a more minute and inoffensive species of the Della Cruscan, is like the game of asking what one's thoughts are like. It is a tortuous, tottering, wriggling, fidgety translation of

everything from the vulgar tongue, into all the tantalising, teasing, tripping, lisping *mimminee-pimminee* of the highest brilliancy and fashion of poetical diction. You have nothing like truth of nature or simplicity of expression. The fastidious and languid reader is never shocked by meeting, from the rarest chance in the world, with a single homely phrase or intelligible idea. You cannot see the thought for the ambiguity of the language, the figure for the finery, the picture for the varnish. The whole is refined, and frittered away into an appearance of the most evanescent brilliancy and tremulous imbecility. There is no other fault to be found with the Pleasures of Memory, than a want of taste and genius. The sentiments are amiable, and the notes at the end highly interesting, particularly the one relating to the Countess's Pillar (as it is called) between Appleby and Penrith, erected (as the inscription tells the thoughtful traveller) by Anne Countess of Pembroke, in the year 1648, in memory of her last parting with her good and pious mother in the same place in the year 1616—

> "To shew that power of love, how great
> Beyond all human estimate."

This story is also told in the poem, but with so many artful innuendoes and tinsel words, that it is hardly intelligible; and still less does it reach the heart.

Campbell's Pleasures of Hope is of the same school: in which a painful attention is paid to the expression in proportion as there is little to express, and the decomposition of prose is substituted for the composition of poetry. How much the sense and keeping in the ideas are sacrificed to a jingle of words and epigrammatic turn of expression, may be seen in such lines as the following:—one of the characters, an old invalid, wishes to end his days under

> "Some hamlet shade, to yield his sickly form
> Health in the breeze, and shelter in the storm."

Now the antithesis here totally fails: for it is the breeze, and not the tree or, as it is quaintly expressed, *hamlet shade* that affords health, though it is the tree that affords shelter in or from the storm. Instances of the same sort of *curiosa infelicitas* are not rare in this author. His verses on the Battle of Hohenlinden have considerable spirit and animation. His Gertrude of Wyoming is his principal performance. It is a kind of historical paraphrase of Mr. Wordsworth's poem of Ruth. It shows little power, or power enervated by extreme fastidiousness. It is

> "——— Of outward show
> Elaborate: of inward less exact."

There are painters who trust more to the setting of their pictures than to the truth of the likeness. Mr. Campbell always seems to me to be thinking how his poetry will look when it comes to be hot-pressed on superfine wove paper, to have a disproportionate eye to points and commas, and dread of errors of the press. He is so afraid of doing wrong, of making the smallest mistake, that he does little or nothing. Lest he should wander irretrievably from the right path, he stands still. He writes according to established etiquette. He offers the Muses no violence. If he lights upon a good thought, he immediately drops it for fear of spoiling a good thing. When he launches a sentiment that you think will float him triumphantly for once to the bottom of the stanza, he stops short at the end of the first or second line, and stands shivering on the brink of beauty, afraid to trust himself to the fathomless abyss. *Tutus nimium, timidusque procellæ.* His very circumspection betrays him. The poet, as well as the woman, that deliberates is undone. He is much like a man whose heart fails him just as he is going up in a balloon, and who breaks his neck by flinging himself out of it when it is too late. Mr. Campbell too often maims and mangles his ideas before they are full formed, to fit

them to the Procrustes' bed of criticism, or strangles his intellectual offspring in the birth, lest they should come to an untimely end in the Edinburgh Review. He plays the hypercritic on himself, and starves his genius to death from a needless apprehension of a plethora. No writer who thinks habitually of the critics, either to tremble at their censures or set them at defiance, can write well. It is the business of reviewers to watch poets, not of poets to watch reviewers. There is one admirable simile in this poem of the European child brought by the sooty Indian in his hand, "like morning brought by night." The love-scenes in Gertrude of Wyoming breathe a balmy voluptuousness of sentiment; but they are generally broken off in the middle: they are like the scent of a bank of violets, faint and rich, which the gale suddenly conveys in a different direction. Mr. Campbell is careful of his own reputation, and economical of the pleasure of his readers. He treats them as the fox in the fable treated his guest, the stork; or, to use his own expression, his fine things are

"Like angels' visits, few, and far between."*

There is another fault in this poem, which is the mechanical structure of the fable. The most striking events occur in the shape of antitheses. The story is cut into the form of a parallelogram. There is the same systematic alternation of good and evil, of violence and repose, that there is of light and shade in a picture. The Indian, who is the chief agent in the interest of the poem, vanishes and returns after long intervals, like the periodical revolutions of the planets. He unexpectedly appears just in

* There is the same idea in Blair's Grave:

"——— Its visits,
Like those of angels, short, and far between."

Mr. Campbell in altering the expression has spoiled it. "Few," and "far between," are the same thing. [Campbell never forgave the author this exposure of his plagiarism.—Ed.]

the nick of time, after years of absence, and without any known reason but the convenience of the author and the astonishment of the reader: as if nature were a machine constructed on a principle of complete contrast, to produce a theatrical effect. *Nec Deus intersit, nisi dignus vindice nodus.* Mr. Campbell's savage never appears but upon great occasions, and then his punctuality is preternatural and alarming. He is the most wonderful instance on record of poetical *reliability.* The most dreadful mischiefs happen at the most mortifying moments; and when your expectations are wound up to the highest pitch, you are sure to have them knocked on the head by a premeditated and remorseless stroke of the poet's pen. This is done so often for the convenience of the author, that in the end it ceases to be for the satisfaction of the reader.

Tom Moore is a poet of a quite different stamp. He is as heedless, gay, and prodigal of his poetical wealth, as the other is careful, reserved, and parsimonious. The genius of both is national. Mr. Moore's Muse is another Ariel, as light, as tricksy, as indefatigable, and as humane a spirit. His fancy is for ever on the wing, flutters in the gale, glitters in the sun. Everything lives, moves, and sparkles in his poetry, while over all love waves his purple light. His thoughts are as restless, as many, and as bright as the insects that people the sun's beam. "So work the honey-bees," extracting liquid sweets from opening buds; so the butterfly expands its wings to the idle air; so the thistle's silver down is wafted over summer seas. An airy voyager on life's stream, his mind inhales the fragrance of a thousand shores, and drinks of endless pleasures under halcyon skies. Wherever his footsteps tend over the enamelled ground of fairy fiction—

> "Around him the bees in play flutter and cluster,
> And gaudy butterflies frolic around."

The fault of Mr. Moore is an exuberance of involuntary

power. His facility of production lessens the effect of, and hangs as a dead weight upon, what he produces. His levity at last oppresses. The infinite delight he takes in such an infinite number of things, creates indifference in minds less susceptible of pleasure than his own. He exhausts attention by being inexhaustible. His variety cloys; his rapidity dazzles and distracts the sight. The graceful ease with which he lends himself to every subject, the genial spirit with which he indulges in every sentiment, prevents him from giving their full force to the masses of things, from connecting them into a whole. He wants intensity, strength, and grandeur. His mind does not brood over the great and permanent: it glances over the surfaces, the first impressions of things, instead of grappling with the deep-rooted prejudices of the mind, its inveterate habits, and that "perilous stuff that weighs upon the heart." His pen, as it is rapid and fanciful, wants momentum and passion. It requires the same principle to make us thoroughly like poetry, that makes us like ourselves so well, the feeling of continued identity. The impressions of Mr. Moore's poetry are detached, desultory, and physical. Its gorgeous colours brighten and fade like the rainbow's. Its sweetness evaporates like the effluvia exhaled from beds of flowers! His gay, laughing style, which relates to the immediate pleasures of love or wine, is better than his sentimental and romantic vein. His Irish melodies are not free from affectation and a certain sickliness of pretension. His serious descriptions are apt to run into flowery tenderness. His pathos sometimes melts into a mawkish sensibility, or crystallises into all the prettinesses of allegorical language, and glittering hardness of external imagery. But he has wit at will, and of the first quality. His satirical and burlesque poetry is his best: it is first-rate. His Twopenny Post-Bag is a perfect "nest of spicery," where the Cayenne is not spared. The politician there sharpens the

poet's pen. In this, too, our bard resembles the bee: he has its honey and its sting.

Mr. Moore ought not to have written Lalla Rookh, even for three thousand guineas. His fame is worth more than that. He should have minded the advice of Fadladeen. It is not, however, a failure, so much as an evasion and a consequent disappointment of public expectation. He should have left it to others to break conventions with nations, and faith with the world. He should, at any rate, have kept his with the public. Lalla Rookh is not what people wanted to see whether Mr. Moore could do; namely, whether he could write a long epic poem. It is four short tales. The interest, however, is often high-wrought and tragic, but the execution still turns to the effeminate and voluptuous side. Fortitude of mind is the first requisite of a tragic or epic writer. Happiness of nature and felicity of genius are the pre-eminent characteristics of the bard of Erin. If he is not perfectly contented with what he is, all the world beside is. He had no temptation to risk anything in adding to the love and admiration of his age, and more than one country:

> "Therefore to be possessed with double pomp,
> To guard a title that was rich before,
> To gild refinèd gold, to paint the lily,
> To throw a perfume on the violet,
> To smooth the ice, or add another hue
> Unto the rainbow, or with taper-light
> To seek the beauteous eye of heav'n to garnish,
> Is wasteful and ridiculous excess."*

The same might be said of Mr. Moore's seeking to bind an epic crown, or the shadow of one, round his other laurels.

If Mr. Moore has not suffered enough personally, Lord Byron (judging from the tone of his writings) might be thought to have suffered too much to be a truly great poet. If Mr. Moore lays himself too open to all the various impulses of things, the outward shows of earth and sky,

* "King John," iv. 2 (Dyce's 2nd edit. of Shakspeare, iv. 50.)—Ed

to every breath that blows, to every stray sentiment that crosses his fancy—Lord Byron shuts himself up too much in the impenetrable gloom of his own thoughts, and buries the natural light of things in "nook monastic." The Giaour, the Corsair, Childe Harold, are all the same person, and they are apparently all himself. The everlasting repetition of one subject, the same dark ground of fiction, with the darker colours of the poet's mind spread over it, the unceasing accumulation of horrors on horror's head, steels the mind against the sense of pain, as inevitably as the unwearied Siren sounds and luxurious monotony of Mr. Moore's poetry make it inaccessible to pleasure. Lord Byron's poetry is as morbid as Mr. Moore's is careless and dissipated. He has more depth of passion, more force and impetuosity, but the passion is always of the same unaccountable character, at once violent and sullen, fierce and gloomy. It is not the passion of a mind struggling with misfortune, or the hopelessness of its desires, but of a mind preying upon itself, and disgusted with, or indifferent to, all other things. There is nothing less poetical than this sort of unaccommodating selfishness. There is nothing more repulsive than this sort of ideal absorption of all the interests of others, of the good and ills of life, in the ruling passion and moody abstraction of a single mind, as if it would make itself the centre of the universe, and there was nothing worth cherishing but its intellectual diseases. It is like a cancer eating into the heart of poetry. But still there is power; and power rivets attention and forces admiration. "He hath a demon:" and that is the next thing to being full of the God. His brow collects the scattered gloom: his eye flashes livid fire that withers and consumes. But still we watch the progress of the scathing bolt with interest, and mark the ruin it leaves behind with awe. Within the contracted range of his imagination, he has great unity and truth of keeping. He chooses

elements and agents congenial to his mind, the dark and glittering ocean, the frail bark hurrying before the storm, pirates and men that "house on the wild sea with wild usages." He gives the tumultuous eagerness of action and the fixed despair of thought. In vigour of style and force of conception, he in one sense surpasses every writer of the present day. His indignant apothegms are like oracles of misanthropy. He who wishes for "a curse to kill with," may find it in Lord Byron's writings. Yet he has beauty lurking underneath his strength, tenderness sometimes joined with the phrensy of despair. A flash of golden light sometimes follows from a stroke of his pencil, like a falling meteor. The flowers that adorn his poetry bloom over charnel-houses and the grave!

There is one subject on which Lord Byron is fond of writing on which I wish he would not write—Bonaparte. Not that I quarrel with his writing for him, or against him, but with his writing both for him and against him. What right has he to do this? Bonaparte's character, be it what else it may, does not change every hour according to his Lordship's varying humour. He is not a pipe for fortune's finger, or for his Lordship's Muse, to play what stop she pleases on. Why should Lord Byron now laud him to the skies in the hour of his success, and then peevishly wreak his disappointment on the God of his idolatry? The man he writes of does not rise or fall with circumstances, but "looks on tempests and is never shaken." Besides, he is a subject for history, and not for poetry:

> "Great princes' favourites their fair leaves spread,
> But as the marigold at the sun's eye,
> And in themselves their pride lies buried;
> For at a frown they in their glory die.
> The painful warrior, famoused for fight,
> After a thousand victories once foil'd,
> Is from the book of honour razed quite,
> And all the rest forgot for which he toil'd."

If Lord Byron will write anything more on this hazardous theme, let him take these lines of Shakspeare for his guide, and finish them in the spirit of the original: they will then be worthy of the subject.

Walter Scott is the most popular of all the poets of the present day, and deservedly so. He describes that which is most easily and generally understood with more vivacity and effect than anybody else. He has no excellences, either of a lofty or recondite kind, which lie beyond the reach of the most ordinary capacity to find out; but he has all the good qualities which all the world agree to understand. His style is clear, flowing, and transparent: his sentiments, of which his style is an easy and natural medium, are common to him with his readers. He has none of Mr. Wordsworth's *idiosyncracy*. He differs from his readers only in a greater range of knowledge and facility of expression. His poetry belongs to the class of *improvisatore* poetry. It has neither depth, height, nor breadth in it; neither uncommon strength, nor uncommon refinement of thought, sentiment, or language. It has no originality. But if this author has no research, no moving power in his own breast, he relies with the greater safety and success on the force of his subject. He selects a story such as is sure to please, full of incidents, characters, peculiar manners, costume, and scenery: and he tells it in a way that can offend no one. He never wearies or disappoints you. He is communicative and garrulous; but he is not his own hero. He never obtrudes himself on your notice to prevent your seeing the subject. What passes in the poem, passes much as it would have done in reality. The author has little or nothing to do with it. Mr. Scott has great intuitive power of fancy, great vividness of pencil in placing external objects and events before the eye. The force of his mind is picturesque, rather than *moral*. He gives more of the features of nature than the soul of passion. He conveys the distinct

outlines and visible changes in outward objects, rather than "their mortal consequences." He is very inferior to Lord Byron in intense passion, to Moore in delightful fancy, to Mr. Wordsworth in profound sentiment; but he has more picturesque power than any of them; that is, he places the objects themselves, about which *they* might feel and think, in a much more striking point of view, with greater variety of dress and attitude, and with more local truth of colouring. His imagery is Gothic and grotesque. The manners and actions have the interest and curiosity belonging to a wild country and a distant period of time. Few descriptions have a more complete reality, a more striking appearance of life and motion, than that of the warriors in the Lady of the Lake, who start up at the command of Rhoderic Dhu from their concealment under the fern, and disappear again in an instant. The Lay of the Last Minstrel and Marmion are the first, and perhaps the best of his works. The Goblin Page in the first of these is a very interesting and inscrutable little personage. In reading these poems, I confess I am a little disconcerted, in turning over the page, to find Mr. Westall's pictures, which always seem *fac-similes* of the persons represented, with ancient costume and a theatrical air. This may be a compliment to Mr. Westall, but it is not one to Walter Scott. The truth is, there is a modern air in the midst of the antiquarian research of Mr. Scott's poetry. It is history or tradition in masquerade. Not only the crust of old words and images is worn off with time,—the substance is grown comparatively light and worthless. The forms are old and uncouth; but the spirit is effeminate and frivolous. This is a deduction from the praise I have given to his pencil for extreme fidelity, though it has been no obstacle to its drawing-room success. He has just hit the town between the romantic and the fashionable, and between the two secured all classes of readers on his side. In a word, I conceive that he is to the great poet what an

excellent mimic is to a great actor. There is no determinate impression left on the mind by reading his poetry. It has no results. The reader rises up from the perusal with new images and associations, but he remains the same man that he was before. A great mind is one that moulds the minds of others. Mr. Scott has put the Border Minstrelsy and scattered traditions of the country into easy, animated verse. But the Notes to his poems are just as entertaining as the poems themselves, and his poems are only entertaining.

Mr. Wordsworth is the most original poet now living. He is the reverse of Walter Scott in his defects and excellences. He has nearly all that the other wants, and wants all that the other possesses. His poetry is not external, but internal; it does not depend upon tradition, or story, or old song; he furnishes it from his own mind, and is his own subject. He is the poet of mere sentiment. Of many of the Lyrical Ballads, it is not possible to speak in terms of too high praise, such as Hart-leap Well, the Banks of the Wye, Poor Susan, parts of the Leech-gatherer, the Lines to a Cuckoo, to a Daisy, the Complaint, several of the Sonnets, and a hundred others of inconceivable beauty, of perfect originality and pathos. They open a finer and deeper vein of thought and feeling than any poet in modern times has done, or attempted. He has produced a deeper impression, and on a smaller circle, than any other of his contemporaries. His powers have been mistaken by the age, nor does he exactly understand them himself. He cannot form a whole. He has not the constructive faculty. He can give only the fine tones of thought, drawn from his mind by accident or nature, like the sounds drawn from the Æolian harp by the wandering gale. He is totally deficient in all the machinery of poetry. His Excursion, taken as a whole, notwithstanding the noble materials thrown away in it, is a proof of this. The line labours, the sentiment moves slow; but the poem

stands stock-still. The reader makes no way from the first line to the last. It is more than anything in the world like Robinson Crusoe's boat, which would have been an excellent good boat, and would have carried him to the other side of the globe, but that he could not get it out of the sand where it stuck fast. I did what little I could to help to launch it at the time, but it would not do. I am not, however, one of those who laugh at the attempts or failures of men of genius. It is not my way to cry, "Long life to the conqueror!" Success and desert are not with me synonymous terms; and the less Mr. Wordsworth's general merits have been understood, the more necessary is it to insist upon them. This is not the place to repeat what I have already said on the subject. The reader may turn to it in the "Round Table." I do not think, however, there is anything in the larger poem equal to many of the detached pieces in the Lyrical Ballads. As Mr. Wordsworth's poems have been little known to the public, or chiefly through garbled extracts from them, I will here give an entire poem (one that has always been a favourite with me), that the reader may know what it is that the admirers of this author find to be delighted with in his poetry. Those who do not feel the beauty and the force of it, may save themselves the trouble of inquiring further:

HART-LEAP WELL.*

"The knight had ridden down from Wensley moor
With the slow motion of a summer's cloud;
He turned aside towards a vassal's door,
And, 'Bring another horse!' he cried aloud.

'Another horse!'—That shout the vassal heard,
And saddled his best steed, a comely gray;
Sir Walter mounted him; he was the third
Which he had mounted on that glorious day.

* 1817, ii. 95-112.—Ed.

Joy sparkled in the prancing courser's eyes :
The horse and horseman are a happy pair ;
But, though Sir Walter like a falcon flies,
There is a doleful silence in the air.

A rout this morning left Sir Walter's hall,
That as they galloped made the echoes roar ;
But horse and man are vanished, one and all ;
Such race, I think, was never seen before.

Sir Walter, restless as a veering wind,
Calls to the few tired dogs that yet remain :
Brach, Swift, and Music, noblest of their kind,
Follow, and up the weary mountain strain.

The knight hallooed, he chid and cheered them on
With suppliant gestures and upbraidings stern ;
But breath and eyesight fail ; and, one by one,
The dogs are stretched among the mountain fern.

Where is the throng, the tumult of the race ?
The bugles that so joyfully were blown ?
—This chase it looks not like an earthly chase ;
Sir Walter and the hart are left alone.

The poor hart toils along the mountain side ;
I will not stop to tell how far he fled,
Nor will I mention by what death he died ;
But now the knight beholds him lying dead.

Dismounting then, he leaned against a thorn ;
He had no follower, dog, nor man, nor boy :
He neither smacked his whip, nor blew his horn,
But gazed upon the spoil with silent joy.

Close to the thorn on which Sir Walter leaned,
Stood his dumb partner in this glorious act ;
Weak as a lamb the hour that it is yeaned,
And foaming like a mountain cataract.

Upon his side the hart was lying stretched :
His nose half-touched a spring beneath a hill,
And with the last deep groan his breath had fetched
The waters of the spring were trembling still.

And now, too happy for repose or rest,
(Was never man in such a joyful case!)
Sir Walter walked all round, north, south, and west,
And gazed, and gazed upon that darling place.

And climbing up the hill (it was at least
Nine roods of sheer ascent) Sir Walter found,
Three several hoof-marks which the hunted beast
Had left imprinted on the verdant ground.

Sir Walter wiped his face and cried, 'Till now
Such sight was never seen by living eyes:
Three leaps have borne him from this lofty brow,
Down to the very fountain where he lies.

I'll build a pleasure-house upon this spot,
And a small arbour, made for rural joy;
'Twill be the traveller's shed, the pilgrim's cot,
A place of love for damsels that are coy.

A cunning artist will I have to frame
A bason for that fountain in the dell;
And they, who do make mention of the same
From this day forth, shall call it HART-LEAP WELL.

And, gallant brute! to make thy praises known
Another monument shall here be raised;
Three several pillars, each a rough-hewn stone,
And planted where thy hoofs the turf have grazed.

And, in the summer-time when days are long,
I will come hither with my paramour;
And with the dancers, and the minstrel's song,
We will make merry in that pleasant bower.

'Till the foundations of the mountains fail,
My mansion with its arbour shall endure;—
The joy of them who till the fields of Swale,
And them who dwell among the woods of Ure!'

Then home he went, and left the hart, stone-dead,
With breathless nostrils stretched above the spring.
—Soon did the knight perform what he had said,
And far and wide the fame thereof did ring.

Ere thrice the moon into her port had steered,
A cup of stone received the living well;
Three pillars of rude stone Sir Walter reared,
And built a house of pleasure in the dell.

And near the fountain, flowers of stature tall
With trailing plants and trees were intertwined,—
Which soon composed a little sylvan hall,
A leafy shelter from the sun and wind.

And thither, when the summer-days were long,
Sir Walter journeyed with his paramour;
And with the dancers and the minstrel's song
Made merriment within that pleasant bower.

The knight, Sir Walter, died in course of time,
And his bones lie in his paternal vale.—
But there is matter for a second rhyme,
And I to this would add another tale."

PART THE SECOND.

"The moving accident is not my trade:
To freeze the blood I have no ready arts:
'Tis my delight, alone in summer shade,
To pipe a simple song for thinking hearts.

As I from Hawes to Richmond did repair,
It chanced that I saw standing in a dell
Three aspens at three corners of a square,
And one, not four yards distant, near a well.

What this imported I could ill divine:
And, pulling now the rein my horse to stop,
I saw three pillars standing in a line,
The last stone pillar on a dark hill-top.

The trees were gray, with neither arms nor head
Half-wasted the square mound of tawny green;
So that you just might say, as then I said,
'Here in old time the hand of man hath been.

I looked upon the hill both far and near,
More doleful place did never eye survey;
It seemed as if the spring-time came not here,
And Nature here were willing to decay.

I stood in various thoughts and fancies lost,
  When one, who was in shepherd's garb attired,
Came up the hollow:—Him did I accost,
  And what this place might be I then inquired.

The shepherd stopped, and that same story told
  Which in my former rhyme I have rehearsed.
'A jolly place,' said he, 'in times of old!
  But something ails it now; the spot is curst.

You see these lifeless stumps of aspen wood—
  Some say that they are beeches, others elms—
These were the bower; and here a mansion stood,
  The finest palace of a hundred realms!

The arbour does its own condition tell;
  You see the stones, the fountain, and the stream;
But as to the great lodge! you might as well
  Hunt half a day for a forgotten dream.

There's neither dog nor heifer, horse nor sheep,
  Will wet his lips within that cup of stone;
And oftentimes, when all are fast asleep,
  This water doth send forth a dolorous groan.

Some say that here a murder has been done,
  And blood cries out for blood: but, for my part,
I've guessed, when I've been sitting in the sun,
  That it was all for that unhappy hart.

What thoughts must through the creature's brain have passed!
  Even from the topmost stone, upon the steep,
Are but three bounds—and look, Sir, at this last—
  —O Master! it has been a cruel leap.

For thirteen hours he ran a desperate race;
  And in my simple mind we cannot tell
What cause the hart might have to love this place,
  And come and make his death-bed near the well.

Here on the grass perhaps asleep he sank,
  Lulled by this fountain in the summer-tide;
This water was perhaps the first he drank
  When he wandered from his mother's side.

In April here beneath the scented thorn
He heard the birds their morning carols sing;
And he, perhaps, for aught we know, was born
Not half a furlong from that self-same spring.

But now here's neither grass nor pleasant shade;
The sun on drearier hollow never shone;
So will it be, as I have often said,
Till trees, and stones, and fountain all are gone.'

Grey-headed Shepherd, thou hast spoken well;
Small difference lies between thy creed and mine:
This beast not unobserved by Nature fell;
His death was mourned by sympathy divine.

The Being, that is in the clouds and air,
That is in the green leaves among the groves,
Maintains a deep and reverential care
For the unoffending creatures whom he loves.

The pleasure-house is dust:—behind, before,
This is no common waste, no common gloom;
But Nature, in due course of time, once more
Shall here put on her beauty and her bloom.

She leaves these objects to a slow decay,
That what we are, and have been, may be known;
But at the coming of the milder day,
These monuments shall all be overgrown.

One lesson, Shepherd, let us two divide,
Taught both by what she shows, and what conceals,
Never to blend our pleasure or our pride
With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels.'"

Mr. Wordsworth is at the head of that which has been denominated the Lake school of poetry; a school which, with all my respect for it, I do not think sacred from criticism or exempt from faults, of some of which faults I shall speak with becoming frankness; for I do not see that the liberty of the press ought to be shackled, or freedom of speech curtailed, to screen either its revolutionary or renegade extravagances. This school of poetry had its origin in the French revolution, or rather in those

sentiments and opinions which produced that revolution; and which sentiments and opinions were directly imported into this country in translations from the German about that period. Our poetical literature had, towards the close of the last century, degenerated into the most trite, insipid, and mechanical of all things, in the hands of the followers of Pope and the old French school of poetry. It wanted something to stir it up, and it found that something in the principles and events of the French revolution. From the impulse it thus received, it rose at once from the most servile imitation and tamest commonplace, to the utmost pitch of singularity and paradox. The change in the belles-lettres was as complete, and to many persons as startling, as the change in politics, with which it went hand in hand. There was a mighty ferment in the heads of statesmen and poets, kings and people. According to the prevailing notions, all was to be natural and new. Nothing that was established was to be tolerated. All the commonplace figures of poetry, tropes, allegories, personifications, with the whole heathen mythology, were instantly discarded; a classical allusion was considered as a piece of antiquated foppery; capital letters were no more allowed in print, than letters-patent of nobility were permitted in real life; kings and queens were dethroned from their rank and station in legitimate tragedy or epic poetry, as they were decapitated elsewhere: rhyme was looked upon as a relic of the feudal system, and regular metre was abolished along with regular government. Authority and fashion, elegance or arrangement, were hooted out of countenance as pedantry and prejudice. Every one did that which was good in his own eyes. The object was to reduce all things to an absolute level; and a singularly affected and outrageous simplicity prevailed in dress and manners, in style and sentiment. A striking effect produced where it was least expected, something new and original, no matter whether good, bad, or indif-

ferent, whether mean or lofty, extravagant or childish, was all that was aimed at, or considered as compatible with sound philosophy and an age of reason. The licentiousness grew extreme: Coryate's Crudities* were nothing to it. The world was to be turned topsy-turvy; and poetry, by the good-will of Adam-wits, was to share its fate and begin *de novo*. It was a time of promise, a renewal of the world and of letters; and the Deucalions, who were paid to perform this feat of regeneration, were the present poet-laureate and the two authors of the Lyrical Ballads.† The Germans, who made heroes of robbers, and honest women of cast-off mistresses, had already exhausted the extravagant and marvellous in sentiment and situation; our native writers adopted a wonderful simplicity of style and matter. The paradox they set out with was, that all things are by nature equally fit subjects for poetry; or that if there is any preference to be given, those that are the meanest and most unpromising are the best, as they leave the greatest scope for the unbounded stores of thought and fancy in the writer's own mind. Poetry had with them "neither buttress nor coigne of vantage to make its pendant bed and procreant cradle." It was not "born so high: its aiery buildeth in the cedar's top, and dallies with the wind, and scorns the sun." It grew like a mushroom out of the ground, or was hidden in it like a truffle, which it required a particular sagacity and industry to find out and dig up. They founded the new school on a principle of sheer humanity, on pure nature void of art. It could not be said of these sweeping reformers and dictators in the

* A singular book of travels in various countries, printed in 1611. I do not know, however, that it is to be charged with any special licentiousness, unless it is where the author furnishes an account of his interview with a Venetian courtesan, accompanied by an illustration of the incident, both harmless enough, to be sure.—Ed.

† Southey, Wordsworth himself, and Coleridge. The *Lyrical Ballads* were published in 1798.—Ed.

republic of letters, that "in their train walked crowns and crownets; that realms and islands, like plates, dropt from their pockets:" but they were surrounded, in company with the Muses, by a mixed rabble of idle apprentices and Botany Bay convicts, female vagrants, gypsies, meek daughters in the family of Christ, of idiot boys and mad mothers, and after them "owls and night-ravens flew." They scorned "degrees, priority, and place, insisture, course, proportion, season, form, office, and custom in all line of order:" the distinctions of birth, the vicissitudes of fortune, did not enter into their abstracted, lofty, and levelling calculation of human nature. He who was more than man, with them was none. They claimed kindred only with the commonest of the people: peasants, pedlars, and village barbers were their oracles and bosom friends. Their poetry, in the extreme to which it professedly tended and was in effect carried, levels all distinctions of nature and society; has "no figures nor no fantasies" which the prejudices of superstition or the customs of the world draw in the brains of men; "no trivial fond records" of all that has existed in the history of past ages; it has no adventitious pride, pomp, or circumstances, to set it off: "the marshal's truncheon, nor the judge's robe:" neither tradition, reverence, nor ceremony "that to great ones 'longs:" it breaks in pieces the golden images of poetry, and defaces its armorial bearings, to melt them down in the mould of common humanity or of its own upstart self-sufficiency. They took the same method in their new-fangled "metre ballad-mongering" scheme which Rousseau did in his prose paradoxes, of exciting attention by reversing the established standards of opinion and estimation in the world. They were for bringing poetry back to its primitive simplicity and state of nature, as he was for bringing society back to the savage state: so that the only thing remarkable left in the world by this change would be the persons who had produced it. A

thorough adept in this school of poetry and philanthropy is jealous of all excellence but his own. He does not even like to share his reputation with his subject; for he would have it all proceed from his own power and originality of mind. Such a one is slow to admire anything that is admirable, feels no interest in what is most interesting to others, no grandeur in anything grand, no beauty in anything beautiful. He tolerates only what he himself creates; he sympathises only with what can enter into no competition with him, with "the bare trees and mountains bare, and grass in the green field." He sees nothing but himself and the universe. He hates all greatness and all pretensions to it, whether well or ill founded. His egotism is in some respects a madness; for he scorns even the admiration of himself, thinking it a presumption in any one to suppose that he has taste or sense enough to understand him. He hates all science and all art; he hates chemistry; he hates conchology; he hates Voltaire; he hates Sir Isaac Newton; he hates wisdom; he hates wit; he hates metaphysics, which he says are unintelligible, and yet he would be thought to understand them; he hates prose; he hates all poetry but his own; he hates the dialogues in Shakspeare; he hates music, dancing, and painting; he hates Rubens; he hates Rembrandt; he hates Raphael; he hates Titian; he hates Vandyke; he hates the antique; he hates the Apollo Belvidere; he hates the Venus of Medicis. This is the reason that so few people take an interest in his writings, because he takes an interest in nothing that others do! The effect has been perceived as something odd; but the cause or principle has never been distinctly traced to its source before, as far as I know. The proofs are to be found everywhere: in Mr. Southey's Botany Bay Eclogues, in his book of Songs and Sonnets, his Odes and Inscriptions so well parodied in the Anti-Jacobin Review, in his Joan of Arc, and last, though not least, in his Wat Tyler:

> "When Adam delved, and Eve span,
> Where was then the gentleman?"

(or the poet laureate either, we may ask?)—in Mr. Coleridge's Ode to an Ass's Foal, in his lines to Sarah, his Religious Musings; and in his and Mr. Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads, *passim.*

Of Mr. Southey's larger epics, I have but a faint recollection at this distance of time, but all that I remember of them is mechanical and extravagant, heavy and superficial. His affected, disjointed style is well imitated in the Rejected Addresses. The difference between him and Sir Richard Blackmore seems to be, that the one is heavy and the other light, the one solemn and the other pragmatical, the one phlegmatic and the other flippant; and that there is no Gay in the present time to give a Catalogue Raisonné of the performances of the living undertaker of epics. Kehama is a loose sprawling figure, such as we see cut out of wood or paper, and pulled or jerked with wire or thread, to make sudden and surprising motions without meaning, grace, or nature in them. By far the best of his works are some of his shorter personal compositions, in which there is an ironical mixture of the quaint and serious, such as his lines on a picture of Gaspar Poussin, the fine tale of Gualberto, his Description of a Pig, and the Holly Tree, which is an affecting, beautiful, and modest retrospect on his own character. May the aspirations with which it concludes be fulfilled![*] But the little he has done of true

* "O reader! hast thou ever stood to see
The Holly Tree?
The eye that contemplates it well perceives
Its glossy leaves,
Ordered by an intelligence so wise
As might confound the Atheist's sophistries.

Below, a circling fence, its leaves are seen
Wrinkled and keen;

and sterling excellence, is overloaded by the quantity of indifferent matter which he turns out every year, "prosing

No grazing cattle through their prickly round
Can reach to wound;
But as they grow where nothing is to fear,
Smooth and unarm'd the pointless leaves appear.

I love to view these things with curious eyes,
And moralize;
And in the wisdom of the Holly Tree
Can emblems see
Wherewith perchance to make a pleasant rhyme,
Such as may profit in the after time.

So, though abroad perchance I might appear
Harsh and austere,
To those who on my leisure would intrude
Reserved and rude,
Gentle at home amid my friends I'd be,
Like the high leaves upon the Holly Tree.

And should my youth, as youth is apt I know,
Some harshness show,
All vain asperities I day by day
Would wear away,
Till the smooth temper of my age should be
Like the high leaves upon the Holly Tree.

And as when all the summer trees are seen
So bright and green,
The Holly leaves their fadeless hues display
Less bright than they,
But when the bare and wintry woods we see,
What then so cheerful as the Holly Tree?

So serious should my youth appear among
The thoughtless throng,
So would I seem amid the young and gay
More grave than they,
That in my age as cheerful I might be
As the green winter of the Holly Tree."

or versing," with equally mechanical and irresistible facility. His Essays, or political and moral disquisitions,

are not so full of original matter as Montaigne's. They are second or third rate compositions in that class.

It remains that I should say a few words of Mr. Coleridge; and there is no one who has a better right to say what he thinks of him than I have. "Is there here any dear friend of Cæsar? To him I say, that Brutus' love to Cæsar was no less than his." But no matter. His Ancient Mariner is his most remarkable performance, and the only one that I could point out to any one as giving an adequate idea of his great natural powers. It is high German, however, and in it he seems to "conceive of poetry but as a drunken dream, reckless, careless, and heedless of past, present, and to come." His tragedies (for he has written two) are not answerable to it; they are, except a few poetical passages, drawling sentiment and metaphysical jargon. He has no genuine dramatic talent. There is one fine passage in his Christabel, that which contains the description of the quarrel between Sir Leoline and Sir Roland de Vaux of Tryermaine, who had been friends in youth:

> "Alas! they had been friends in youth,
> But whispering tongues can poison truth;
> And constancy lives in realms above;
> And life is thorny; and youth is vain;
> And to be wroth with one we love,
> Doth work like madness in the brain:
> And thus it chanc'd as I divine,
> With Roland and Sir Leoline.
> Each spake words of high disdain
> And insult to his heart's best brother,
> And parted ne'er to meet again!
> But neither ever found another
> To free the hollow heart from paining—
>
> They stood aloof, the scars remaining,
> Like cliffs which had been rent asunder:
> A dreary sea now floats between,
> But neither heat, nor frost, nor thunder,
> Shall wholly do away I ween
> The marks of that which once hath been.

Sir Leoline a moment's space
Stood gazing on the damsel's face;
And the youthful lord of Tryermaine
Came back upon his heart again."

It might seem insidious if I were to praise his ode entitled Fire, Famine, and Slaughter, as an effusion of high poetical enthusiasm and strong political feeling. His Sonnet to Schiller conveys a fine compliment to the author of the Robbers, and an equally fine idea of the state of youthful enthusiasm in which he composed it:

"Schiller! that hour I would have wish'd to die,
If through the shudd'ring midnight I had sent
From the dark dungeon of the tower time-rent,
That fearful voice, a famish'd father's cry—

That in no after moment aught less vast
Might stamp me mortal! A triumphant shout
Black Horror scream'd, and all her goblin rout,
From the more with'ring scene diminish'd pass'd.

Ah! Bard tremendous in sublimity!
Could I behold thee in thy loftier mood,
Wand'ring at eve, with finely frenzied eye,
Beneath some vast old tempest-swinging wood!
Awhile, with mute awe gazing, I would brood,
Then weep aloud in a wild ecstacy!"

His *Conciones ad Populum*, Watchman, &c., are dreary trash. Of his Friend, I have spoken the truth elsewhere. But I may say of him here, that he is the only person I ever knew who answered to the idea of a man of genius. He is the only person from whom I ever learnt anything. There is only one thing he could learn from me in return, but *that* he has not. He was the first poet I ever knew. His genius at that time [1798]* had angelic wings, and fed on manna. He talked on for ever; and you wished him to talk on for ever. His thoughts did not seem to come with labour and effort, but as if borne on the gusts of

* See *Memoirs of William Hazlitt*, 1867, chaps. iii.-v.—Ed.

genius, and as if the wings of his imagination lifted him from off his feet. His voice rolled on the ear like the pealing organ, and its sound alone was the music of thought. His mind was clothed with wings; and raised on them, he lifted philosophy to heaven. In his descriptions, you then saw the progress of human happiness and liberty in bright and never-ending succession, like the steps of Jacob's Ladder, with airy shapes ascending and descending, and with the voice of God at the top of the ladder. And shall I, who heard him then, listen to him now? Not I! . . . . . That spell is broken; that time is gone for ever; that voice is heard no more: but still the recollection comes rushing by with thoughts of long-past years, and rings in my ears with never-dying sound:

> "What though the radiance which was once so bright
> Be now for ever taken from my sight—
> Though nothing can bring back the hour
> Of glory in the grass, of splendour in the flow'r?
> I do not grieve, but rather find
> Strength in what remains behind;
> In the primal sympathy,
> Which having been, must ever be;
> In the soothing thoughts that spring
> Out of human suffering;
> In years that bring the philosophic mind!"

I have thus gone through the task I intended, and have come at last to the level ground. I have felt my subject gradually sinking from under me as I advanced, and have been afraid of ending in nothing. The interest has unavoidably decreased at almost every successive step of the progress, like a play that has its catastrophe in the first or second act. This, however, I could not help. I have done as well as I could.

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THE

ENGLISH COMIC WRITERS.

LECTURE I.—INTRODUCTORY.

ON WIT AND HUMOUR.

Man is the only animal that laughs and weeps; for he is the only animal that is struck with the difference between what things are, and what they ought to be. We weep at what thwarts or exceeds our desires in serious matters: we laugh at what only disappoints our expectations in trifles. We shed tears from sympathy with real and necessary distress; as we burst into laughter from want of sympathy with that which is unreasonable and unnecessary, the absurdity of which provokes our spleen or mirth, rather than any serious reflections on it.

To explain the nature of laughter and tears, is to account for the condition of human life; for it is in a manner compounded of these two! It is a tragedy or a comedy—sad or merry, as it happens. The crimes and misfortunes that are inseparable from it, shock and wound the mind when they once seize upon it, and when the pressure can no longer be borne, seek relief in tears: the follies and absurdities that men commit, or the odd accidents that befal them, afford us amusement from the very rejection of these false claims upon our sympathy,

and end in laughter. If everything that went wrong, if every vanity or weakness in another gave us a sensible pang, it would be hard indeed: but as long as the disagreeableness of the consequences of a sudden disaster is kept out of sight by the immediate oddity of the circumstances, and the absurdity or unaccountableness of a foolish action is the most striking thing in it, the ludicrous prevails over the pathetic, and we receive pleasure instead of pain from the farce of life which is played before us, and which discomposes our gravity as often as it fails to move our anger or our pity!

Tears may be considered as the natural and involuntary resource of the mind overcome by some sudden and violent emotion, before it has had time to reconcile its feelings to the change of circumstances: while laughter may be defined to be the same sort of convulsive and involuntary movement, occasioned by mere surprise or contrast (in the absence of any more serious emotion), before it has time to reconcile its belief to contradictory appearances. If we hold a mask before our face, and approach a child with this disguise on, it will at first, from the oddity and incongruity of the appearance, be inclined to laugh; if we go nearer to it, steadily, and without saying a word, it will begin to be alarmed, and be half inclined to cry: if we suddenly take off the mask, it will recover from its fears, and burst out a-laughing; but if, instead of presenting the old well-known countenance, we have concealed a satyr's head or some frightful caricature behind the first mask, the suddenness of the change will not in this case be a source of merriment to it, but will convert its surprise into an agony of consternation, and will make it scream out for help, even though it may be convinced that the whole is a trick at bottom.

The alternation of tears and laughter, in this little episode in common life, depends almost entirely on the greater or less degree of interest attached to the different

changes of appearance. The mere suddenness of the transition, the mere baulking our expectations, and turning them abruptly into another channel, seems to give additional liveliness and gaiety to the animal spirits; but the instant the change is not only sudden, but threatens serious consequences, or calls up the shape of danger, terror supersedes our disposition to mirth, and laughter gives place to tears. It is usual to play with infants, and make them laugh by clapping your hands suddenly before them; but if you clap your hands too loud, or too near their sight, their countenances immediately change, and they hide them in the nurse's arms. Or suppose the same child grown up a little older, comes to a place, expecting to meet a person it is particularly fond of, and does not find that person there, its countenance suddenly falls, its lips begin to quiver, its cheek turns pale, its eye glistens, and it vents its little sorrow (grown too big to be concealed) in a flood of tears. Again, if the child meets the same person unexpectedly after long absence, the same effect will be produced by an excess of joy, with different accompaniments; that is, the surprise and the emotion excited will make the blood come into his face, his eyes sparkle, his tongue falter or be mute; but in either case the tears will gush to his relief, and lighten the pressure about his heart. On the other hand, if a child is playing at hide-and-seek or blindman's-buff, with persons it is ever so fond of, and either misses them where it had made sure of finding them, or suddenly runs up against them where it had least expected it, the shock or additional impetus given to the imagination by the disappointment or the discovery, in a matter of this indifference, will only vent itself in a fit of laughter.* The

* A child that has hid itself out of the way in sport, is under a great temptation to laugh at the unconsciousness of others as to its situation. A person concealed from assassins is in no danger of betraying his situation by laughing.

transition here is not from one thing of importance to another, or from a state of indifference to a state of strong excitement; but merely from one impression to another that we did not at all expect, and when we had expected just the contrary. The mind having been led to form a certain conclusion, and the result producing an immediate solution of continuity in the chain of our ideas, this alternate excitement and relaxation of the imagination, the object also striking upon the mind more vividly in its loose unsettled state, and before it has had time to recover and collect itself, causes that alternate excitement and relaxation, or irregular convulsive movement of the muscular and nervous system, which constitutes physical laughter. The *discontinuous* in our sensations produces a correspondent jar and discord in the frame. The steadiness of our faith and of our features begins to give way at the same time. We turn with an incredulous smile from a story that staggers our belief: and we are ready to split our sides with laughing at an extravagance that sets all common sense and serious concern at defiance.

To understand or define the ludicrous, we must first know what the serious is. Now the serious is the habitual stress which the mind lays upon the expectation of a given order of events, following one another with a certain regularity and weight of interest attached to them. When this stress is increased beyond its usual pitch of intensity, so as to overstrain the feelings by the violent opposition of good to bad, or of objects to our desires, it becomes the pathetic or tragical. The ludicrous, or comic, is the unexpected loosening or relaxing this stress below its usual pitch of intensity, by such an abrupt transposition of the order of our ideas, as taking the mind unawares, throws it off its guard, startles it into a lively sense of pleasure, and leaves no time nor inclination for painful reflections.

The essence of the laughable then is the incongruous, the disconnecting one idea from another, or the jostling of one feeling against another. The first and most obvious cause of laughter is to be found in the simple succession of events, as in the sudden shifting of a disguise, or some unlooked for accident, without any absurdity of character or situation. The accidental contradiction between our expectations and the event can hardly be said, however, to amount to the ludicrous: it is merely laughable. The ludicrous is where there is the same contradiction between the object and our expectations, heightened by some deformity or inconvenience, that is, by its being contrary to what is customary or desirable; as the ridiculous, which is the highest degree of the laughable, is that which is contrary not only to custom but to sense and reason, or is a voluntary departure from what we have a right to expect from those who are conscious of absurdity and propriety in words, looks, and actions.

Of these different kinds or degrees of the laughable, the first is the most shallow and short-lived; for the instant the immediate surprise of a thing's merely happening one way or another is over, there is nothing to throw us back upon our former expectation, and renew our wonder at the event a second time. The second sort, that is, the ludicrous arising out of the improbable or distressing, is more deep and lasting, either because the painful catastrophe excites a greater curiosity, or because the old impression, from its habitual hold on the imagination, still recurs mechanically, so that it is longer before we can seriously make up our minds to the unaccountable deviation from it. The third sort, or the ridiculous arising out of absurdity as well as improbability, that is, where the defect or weakness is of a man's own seeking, is the most refined of all, but not always so pleasant as the last, because the same contempt and disapprobation

which sharpens and subtilises our sense of the impropriety, adds a severity to it inconsistent with perfect ease and enjoyment. This last species is properly the province of satire. The principle of contrast is, however, the same in all the stages, in the simply laughable, the ludicrous, the ridiculous; and the effect is only the more complete, the more durably and pointedly this principle operates.

To give some examples in these different kinds. We laugh, when children, at the sudden removing of a pasteboard mask; we laugh when grown up more gravely at the tearing off the mask of deceit. We laugh at absurdity; we laugh at deformity. We laugh at a bottle-nose in a caricature; at a stuffed figure of an alderman in a pantomime; and at the tale of Slaukenbergius. A giant standing by a dwarf makes a contemptible figure enough. Rosinante and Dapple are laughable from contrast, as their masters from the same principle make two for a pair. We laugh at the dress of foreigners, and they at ours. Three chimney-sweepers meeting three Chinese in Lincoln's-inn Fields, they laughed at one another till they were ready to drop down. Country people laugh at a person because they never saw him before. Any one dressed in the height of the fashion, or quite out of it, is equally an object of ridicule. One rich source of the ludicrous is distress with which we cannot sympathize from its absurdity or insignificance. Women laugh at their lovers. We laugh at a damned author, in spite of our teeth, and though he may be our friend. "There is something in the misfortunes of our best friends that pleases us." We laugh at people on the top of a stage-coach, or in it, if they seem in great extremity. It is hard to hinder children from laughing at a stammerer, at a negro, at a drunken man, or even at a madman. We laugh at mischief. We laugh at what we do not believe. We say that an

argument or an assertion that is very absurd, is quite ludicrous. We laugh to show our satisfaction with ourselves, or our contempt for those about us, or to conceal our envy or our ignorance. We laugh at fools, and at those who pretend to be wise—at extreme simplicity, awkwardness, hypocrisy, and affectation. "They were talking of me," says Scrub, "for they laughed *consumedly*." Lord Foppington's insensibility to ridicule, and airs of ineffable self-conceit, are no less admirable; and Joseph Surface's cant maxims of morality, when once disarmed of their power to do hurt, become sufficiently ludicrous. We laugh at that in others which is a serious matter to ourselves; because our self-love is stronger than our sympathy, sooner takes the alarm, and instantly turns our heedless mirth into gravity, which only enhances the jest to others. Some one is generally sure to be the sufferer by a joke. What is sport to one, is death to another. It is only very sensible or very honest people, who laugh as freely at their own absurdities as at those of their neighbours. In general the contrary rule holds, and we only laugh at those misfortunes in which we are spectators, not sharers. The injury, the disappointment, shame, and vexation that we feel, put a stop to our mirth; while the disasters that come home to us, and excite our repugnance and dismay, are an amusing spectacle to others. The greater resistance we make, and the greater the perplexity into which we are thrown, the more lively and *piquant* is the intellectual display of cross-purposes to the bystanders. Our humiliation is their triumph. We are occupied with the disagreeableness of the result instead of its oddity or unexpectedness. Others see only the conflict of motives, and the sudden alternation of events; we feel the pain as well, which more than counterbalances the speculative entertainment we might receive from the contemplation of our abstract situation.

You cannot force people to laugh: you cannot give

a reason why they should laugh: they must laugh of themselves, or not at all. As we laugh from a spontaneous impulse, we laugh the more at any restraint upon this impulse. We laugh at a thing merely because we ought not. If we think we must not laugh, this perverse impediment makes our temptation to laugh the greater; for by endeavouring to keep the obnoxious image out of sight, it comes upon us more irresistibly and repeatedly; and the inclination to indulge our mirth, the longer it is held back, collects its force, and breaks out the more violently in peals of laughter. In like manner, any thing we must not think of makes us laugh, by its coming upon us by stealth and unawares, and from the very efforts we make to exclude it. A secret, a loose word, a wanton jest, make people laugh. Aretine laughed himself to death at hearing a lascivious story. Wickedness is often made a substitute for wit; and in most of our good old comedies, the intrigue of the plot and the double meaning of the dialogue go hand-in-hand, and keep up the ball with wonderful spirit between them. The consciousness, however it may arise, that there is something that we ought to look grave at, is almost always a signal for laughing outright: we can hardly keep our countenance at a sermon, a funeral, or a wedding. What an excellent old custom was that of throwing the stocking! What a deal of innocent mirth has been spoiled by the disuse of it! It is not an easy matter to preserve decorum in courts of justice. The smallest circumstance that interferes with the solemnity of the proceedings, throws the whole place into an uproar of laughter. People at the point of death often say smart things. Sir Thomas More jested with his executioner. Rabelais and Wycherley both died with a *bon-mot* in their mouths.

Misunderstandings (*mal-entendus*), where one person means one thing, and another is aiming at something else,

are another great source of comic humour, on the same principle of ambiguity and contrast. There is a high-wrought instance of this in the dialogue between Aimwell and Gibbet, in the 'Beaux' Stratagem,' where Aimwell mistakes his companion for an officer in a marching regiment, and Gibbet takes it for granted that the gentleman is a highwayman. The alarm and consternation occasioned by some one saying to him, in the course of common conversation, "I apprehend you," is the most ludicrous thing in that admirably natural and powerful performance, Mr. Emery's 'Robert Tyke.' Again, unconsciousness in the person himself of what he is about, or of what others think of him, is also a great heightener of the sense of absurdity. It makes it come the fuller home upon us from his insensibility to it. His simplicity sets off the satire, and gives it a finer edge. It is a more extreme case still where the person is aware of being the object of ridicule, and yet seems perfectly reconciled to it as a matter of course. So wit is often the more forcible and pointed for being dry and serious, for it then seems as if the speaker himself had no intention in it, and we were the first to find it out. Irony, as a species of wit, owes its force to the same principle. In such cases it is the contrast between the appearance and the reality, the suspense of belief and the seeming incongruity, that gives point to the ridicule, and makes it enter the deeper when the first impression is overcome. Excessive impudence, as in the 'Liar;' or excessive modesty, as in the hero of 'She stoops to Conquer;' or a mixture of the two, as in the 'Busy Body,' are equally amusing. Lying is a species of wit and humour. To lay anything to a person's charge from which he is perfectly free, shows spirit and invention; and the more incredible the effrontery, the greater is the joke.

There is nothing more powerfully humorous than what is called *keeping* in comic character, as we see it very

finely exemplified in Sancho Panza and Don Quixote. The proverbial phlegm and the romantic gravity of these two celebrated persons may be regarded as the height of this kind of excellence. The deep feeling of character strengthens the sense of the ludicrous. Keeping in comic character is consistency in absurdity; a determined and laudable attachment to the incongruous and singular. The regularity completes the contradiction; for the number of instances of deviation from the right line, branching out in all directions, shows the inveteracy of the original bias to any extravagance or folly, the natural improbability, as it were, increasing every time with the multiplication of chances for a return to common sense, and in the end mounting up to an incredible and unaccountably ridiculous height, when we find our expectations as invariably baffled. The most curious problem of all, is this truth of absurdity to itself. That reason and good sense should be consistent, is not wonderful: but that caprice, and whim, and fantastical prejudice, should be uniform and infallible in their results, is the surprising thing. But while this characteristic clue to absurdity helps on the ridicule, it also softens and harmonises its excesses; and the ludicrous is here blended with a certain beauty and decorum, from this very truth of habit and sentiment, or from the principle of similitude in dissimilitude. The devotion to nonsense, and enthusiasm about trifles, is highly affecting as a moral lesson: it is one of the striking weaknesses and greatest happinesses of our nature. That which excites so lively and lasting an interest in itself, even though it should not be wisdom, is not despicable in the sight of reason and humanity. We cannot suppress the smile on the lip; but the tear should also stand ready to start from the eye. The history of hobby-horses is equally instructive and delightful; and after the pair I have just alluded to, My Uncle Toby's is one of the best and gentlest that "ever lifted leg!" The

inconveniences, odd accidents, falls, and bruises, to which they expose their riders, contribute their share to the amusement of the spectators; and the blows and wounds that the Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance received in his many perilous adventures, have applied their healing influence to many a hurt mind. In what relates to the laughable, as it arises from unforeseen accidents or self-willed scrapes, the pain, the shame, the mortification, and utter helplessness of situation, add to the joke, provided they are momentary, or overwhelming only to the imagination of the sufferer. Malvolio's punishment and apprehensions are as comic, from our knowing that they are not real, as Christopher Sly's drunken transformation and short-lived dream of happiness are for the like reason. Parson Adams's fall into the tub at the 'Squire's, or his being discovered in bed with Mrs. Slipslop, though pitiable, are laughable accidents: nor do we read with much gravity of the loss of his 'Æschylus,' serious as it was to him at the time. A Scotch clergyman, as he was going to church, seeing a spruce conceited mechanic who was walking before him, suddenly covered all over with dirt, either by falling into the kennel, or by some other calamity befalling him, smiled and passed on: but afterwards seeing the same person, who had stopped to refit, seated directly facing him in the gallery, with a look of perfect satisfaction and composure, as if nothing of the sort had happened to him, the idea of his late disaster and present self-complacency struck him so powerfully, that, unable to resist the impulse, he flung himself back in the pulpit, and laughed till he could laugh no longer. I remember reading a story in an odd number of the 'European Magazine,' of an old gentleman who used to walk out every afternoon, with a gold-headed cane, in the fields opposite Baltimore House, which were then open, only with footpaths crossing them. He was frequently accosted by a beggar with a wooden leg, to whom he gave

money, which only made him more importunate. One day, when he was more troublesome than usual, a well-dressed person happening to come up, and observing how saucy the fellow was, said to the gentleman, "Sir, if you will lend me your cane for a moment, I'll give him a good thrashing for his impertinence." The old gentleman, smiling at the proposal, handed him his cane, which the other no sooner was going to apply to the shoulders of the culprit, than he immediately whipped off his wooden leg, and scampered off with great alacrity, and his chastiser after him as hard as he could go. The faster the one ran, the faster the other followed him, brandishing the cane, to the great astonishment of the gentleman who owned it, till having fairly crossed the fields, they suddenly turned a corner, and nothing more was seen of either of them.

In the way of mischievous adventure, and a wanton exhibition of ludicrous weakness in character, nothing is superior to the comic parts of the 'Arabian Nights' Entertainments.' To take only the set of stories of the Little Hunchback, who was choked with a bone, and the Barber of Bagdad and his seven brothers,—there is that of the tailor who was persecuted by the miller's wife, and who, after toiling all night in the mill, got nothing for his pains:—of another who fell in love with a fine lady who pretended to return his passion, and inviting him to her house, as the preliminary condition of her favour, had his eyebrows shaved, his clothes stripped off, and being turned loose into a winding gallery, he was to follow her, and by overtaking obtain all his wishes; but, after a turn or two, stumbled on a trap-door, and fell plump into the street, to the great astonishment of the spectators and his own, shorn of his eyebrows, naked, and without a ray of hope left: that of the castle-building pedlar who, in kicking his wife, the supposed daughter of an emperor, kicks down his basket of glass, the brittle foundation of

his ideal wealth, his good fortune, and his arrogance:—that, again, of the beggar who dined with the Barmecide, and feasted with him on the names of wines and dishes: and, last and best of all, the inimitable story of the Impertinent Barber himself, one of the seven, and worthy to be so; his pertinacious, incredible, teasing, deliberate, yet unmeaning folly, his wearing out the patience of the young gentleman whom he is sent for to shave, his preparations and his professions of speed, his taking out an astrolabe to measure the height of the sun while his razors are getting ready, his dancing the dance of Zimri and singing the song of Zamtout, his disappointing the young man of an assignation, following him to the place of rendezvous, and alarming the master of the house in his anxiety for his safety, by which his unfortunate patron loses his hand in the affray: and this is felt as an awkward accident. The danger which the same loquacious person is afterwards in, of losing his head for want of saying who he was, because he would not forfeit his character of being "justly called the Silent," is a consummation of the jest, though, if it had really taken place, it would have been carrying the joke too far. There are a thousand instances of the same sort in the Thousand and One Nights, which are an inexhaustible mine of comic humour and invention, and which, from the manners of the East which they describe, carry the principle of callous indifference in a jest as far as it can go. The serious and marvellous stories in that work, which have been so much admired and so greedily read, appear to me monstrous and abortive fictions, like disjointed dreams, dictated by a preternatural dread of arbitrary and despotic power, as the comic and familiar stories are rendered proportionably amusing and interesting from the same principle operating in a different direction, and producing endless uncertainty and vicissitude, and an heroic contempt for the untoward accidents and petty vexations of

human life. It is the gaiety of despair, the mirth and laughter of a respite during pleasure from death. The strongest instances of effectual and harrowing imagination are in the story of Amine and her three sisters, whom she led by her side as a leash of hounds, and of the *goul* who nibbled grains of rice for her dinner, and preyed on human carcasses. In this condemnation of the serious parts of the 'Arabian Nights,' I have nearly all the world, and in particular the author of the 'Ancient Mariner,' against me, who must be allowed to be a judge of such matters, and who said, with a subtlety of philosophical conjecture which he alone possesses, "That if I did not like them, it was because I did not dream." On the other hand, I have Bishop Atterbury on my side, who, in a letter to Pope, fairly confesses that "he could not read them in his old age."

There is another source of comic humour which has been but little touched on or attended to by the critics—not the infliction of casual pain, but the pursuit of uncertain pleasure and idle gallantry. Half the business and gaiety of comedy turns upon this. Most of the adventures, difficulties, demurs, hair-breadth 'scapes, disguises, deceptions, blunders, disappointments, successes, excuses, all the dexterous manœuvres, artful inuendoes, assignations, billets-doux, *double entendres*, sly allusions, and elegant flattery, have an eye to this—to the obtaining of those "favours secret, sweet, and precious," in which love and pleasure consist, and which when attained, and the *equivoque* is at an end, the curtain drops, and the play is over. All the attractions of a subject that can only be glanced at indirectly, that is a sort of forbidden ground to the imagination, except under severe restrictions, which are constantly broken through; all the resources it supplies for intrigue and invention; the bashfulness of the clownish lover, his looks of alarm and petrified astonishment; the foppish affectation and easy confidence of the

happy man; the dress, the airs, the languor, the scorn, and indifference of the fine lady; the bustle, pertness, loquaciousness, and tricks of the chambermaid; the impudence, lies, and roguery of the valet; the match-making and unmaking; the wisdom of the wise; the sayings of the witty, the folly of the fool; "the soldier's, scholar's, courtier's eye, tongue, sword, the glass of fashion and the mould of form," have all a view to this. It is the closet in 'Blue-Beard.' It is the life and soul of Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Farquhar's plays. It is the salt of comedy, without which it would be worthless and insipid. It makes Horner decent, and Millamant divine. It is the jest between Tattle and Miss Prue. It is the bait with which Olivia, in the 'Plain Dealer,' plays with honest Manly. It lurks at the bottom of the catechism which Archer teaches Cherry, and which she learns by heart. It gives the finishing grace to Mrs. Amlet's confession—"Though I'm old, I'm chaste." Valentine and his Angelica would be nothing without it; Miss Peggy would not be worth a gallant; and Slender's "sweet Anne Page" would be no more! "The age of comedy would be gone, and the glory of our playhouses extinguished for ever." Our old comedies would be invaluable, were it only for this, that they keep alive this sentiment, which still survives in all its fluttering grace and breathless palpitations on the stage.

Humour is the describing the ludicrous as it is in itself; wit is the exposing it, by comparing or contrasting it with something else. Humour is, as it were, the growth of nature and accident; wit is the product of art and fancy. Humour, as it is shown in books, is an imitation of the natural or acquired absurdities of mankind, or of the ludicrous in accident, situation, and character: wit is the illustrating and heightening the sense of that absurdity by some sudden and unexpected likeness or opposition of one thing to another, which sets off the quality we laugh at or

despise in a still more contemptible or striking point of view. Wit, as distinguished from poetry, is the imagination or fancy inverted, and so applied to given objects, as to make the little look less, the mean more light and worthless; or to divert our admiration or wean our affections from that which is lofty and impressive, instead of producing a more intense admiration and exalted passion, as poetry does. Wit may sometimes, indeed, be shown in compliments as well as satire; as in the common epigram—

> "Accept a miracle, instead of wit:
> See two dull lines with Stanhope's pencil writ."

But then the mode of paying it is playful and ironical, and contradicts itself in the very act of making its own performance an humble foil to another's. Wit hovers round the borders of the light and trifling, whether in matters of pleasure or pain; for as soon as it describes the serious seriously, it ceases to be wit, and passes into a different form. Wit is, in fact, the eloquence of indifference, or an ingenious and striking exposition of those evanescent and glancing impressions of objects which affect us more from surprise or contrast to the train of our ordinary and literal preconceptions, than from anything in the objects themselves exciting our necessary sympathy or lasting hatred. The favourite employment of wit is to add littleness to littleness, and heap contempt on insignificance by all the arts of petty and incessant warfare; or if it ever affects to aggrandise, and use the language of hyperbole, it is only to betray into derision by a fatal comparison, as in the mock-heroic; or if it treats of serious passion, it must do it so as to lower the tone of intense and high-wrought sentiment, by the introduction of burlesque and familiar circumstances. To give an instance or two. Butler, in his 'Hudibras,' compares the change of night into day, to the change of colour in a boiled lobster:

"The sun had long since, in the lap
Of Thetis, taken out his nap;
And, like a lobster boil'd, the morn
From black to red, began to turn:
When Hudibras, whom thoughts and aching
'Twixt sleeping kept all night, and waking,
Began to rub his drowsy eyes,
And from his couch prepared to rise,
Resolving to dispatch the deed
He vow'd to do with trusty speed."

Compare this with the following stanzas in Spenser, treating of the same subject:—

"By this the Northern Waggoner had set
His seven-fold team behind the stedfast star,
That was in Ocean waves yet never wet,
But firm is fix'd and sendeth light from far
To all that in the wide deep wand'ring are:
And cheerful chanticleer with his note shrill,
Had warned once that Phœbus' fiery car
In haste was climbing up the eastern hill,
Full envious that night so long his room did fill.

'At last the golden oriental gate
Of greatest heaven 'gan to open fair,
And Phœbus, fresh as bridegroom to his mate,
Came dancing forth, shaking his dewy hair,
And hurl'd his glist'ring beams through gloomy air:
Which when the wakeful elf perceiv'd, straightway
He started up and did himself prepare
In sun-bright arms and battailous array,
For with that pagan proud he combat will that day."

In this last passage, every image is brought forward that can give effect to our natural impression of the beauty, the splendour, and solemn grandeur of the rising sun; pleasure and power wait on every line and word; whereas, in the other, the only memorable thing is a grotesque and ludicrous illustration of the alteration which takes place from darkness to gorgeous light, and that brought from the lowest instance, and with associations that can only disturb and perplex the imagination in its conception of

the real object it describes. There cannot be a more witty, and at the same time degrading comparison, than that in the same author, of the Bear turning round the pole-star to a bear tied to a stake:—

> "But now a sport more formidable
> Had raked together village rabble;
> 'Twas an old way of recreating
> Which learned butchers call bear-baiting,
> A bold adventrous exercise
> With ancient heroes in high prize,
> For authors do affirm it came
> From Isthmian or Nemæan game;
> Others derive it from the Bear
> That's fixed in northern hemisphere,
> And round about his pole does make
> A circle like a bear at stake,
> That at the chain's end wheels about
> And overturns the rabble rout."

I need not multiply examples of this sort. Wit or ludicrous invention produces its effect oftenest by comparison, but not always. It frequently effects its purposes by unexpected and subtle distinctions. For instance, in the first kind, Mr. Sheridan's description of Mr. Addington's administration as the fag end of Mr. Pitt's, who had remained so long on the treasury bench that, like Nicias in the fable, "he left the sitting part of the man behind him," is as fine an example of metaphorical wit as any on record. The same idea seems, however, to have been included in the old well-known nickname of the *Rump* Parliament. Almost as happy an instance of the other kind of wit, which consists in sudden retorts, in turns upon an idea, and diverting the train of your adversary's argument abruptly and adroitly into another channel, may be seen in the sarcastic reply of Porson, who hearing some one observe, that "certain modern poets would be read and admired when Homer and Virgil were forgotten," made answer—"And not till then!" Sir Robert Walpole's definition of the gratitude of place-expectants, "That it is

a lively sense of *future* favours," is no doubt wit, but it does not consist in the finding out any coincidence or likeness, but in suddenly transposing the order of time in the common account of this feeling, so as to make the professions of those who pretend to it correspond more with their practice. It is filling up a blank in the human heart with a word that explains its hollowness at once. Voltaire's saying, in answer to a stranger who was observing how tall his trees grew—"That they had nothing else to do"—was a quaint mixture of wit and humour, making it out as if they really led a lazy, laborious life; but there was here neither allusion or metaphor, Again, that master-stroke in Hudibras is sterling wit and profound satire, where speaking of certain religious hypocrites he says, that they

> "Compound for sins they are inclin'd to,
> By damning those they have no mind to;"

but the wit consists in the truth of the character, and in the happy exposure of the ludicrous contradiction between the pretext and the practice; between their lenity towards their own vices, and their severity to those of others. The same principle of nice distinction must be allowed to prevail in those lines of the same author, where he is professing to expound the dreams of judicial astrology.

> "There's but the twinkling of a star
> Betwixt a man of peace and war;
> A thief and justice, fool and knave,
> A huffing officer and a slave;
> A crafty lawyer and pickpocket,
> A great philosopher and a blockhead;
> A formal preacher and a player,
> A learn'd physician and man slayer."

The finest piece of wit I know of, is in the lines of Pope on the Lord Mayor's show—

> "Now night descending, the proud scene is o'er,
> But lives in Settle's numbers one day more."

This is certainly as mortifying an inversion of the idea of poetical immortality as could be thought of; it fixes the *maximum* of littleness and insignificance: but it is not by likeness to anything else that it does this, but by literally taking the lowest possible duration of ephemeral reputation, marking it (as with a slider) on the scale of endless renown, and giving a rival credit for it as his loftiest praise. In a word, the shrewd separation or disentangling of ideas that seem the same, or where the secret contradiction is not sufficiently suspected, and is of a ludicrous and whimsical nature, is wit just as much as the bringing together those that appear at first sight totally different. There is then no sufficient ground for admitting Mr. Locke's celebrated definition of wit, which he makes to consist in the finding out striking and unexpected resemblances in things as so to make pleasant pictures in the fancy, while judgment and reason, according to him, lie the clean contrary way, in separating and nicely distinguishing those wherein the smallest difference is to be found.*

* His words are—"If in having our ideas in the memory ready at hand consists quickness of parts, in this of having them unconfused, and being able nicely to distinguish one thing from another, where there is but the least difference, consists in a great measure the exactness of judgment and clearness of reason, which is to be observed in one man above another. And hence, perhaps, may be given some reason of that common observation, that men who have a great deal of wit and prompt memories, have not always the clearest judgment or deepest reason. For wit lying mostly in the assemblage of ideas, and putting them together with quickness and variety, wherein can be found any resemblance or congruity, thereby to make up pleasant pictures and agreeable visions in the fancy; judgment, on the contrary, lies quite on the other side, in separating carefully one from another, ideas wherein can be found the least difference, thereby to avoid being misled by similitude, and by affinity to take one thing for another." ('Essay,' vol i. p. 143.) This definition, such as it is, Mr. Locke took without acknowledgment from Hobbes, who says in his 'Leviathan,' "This difference of quickness is caused by the difference of men's passions that love

On this definition Harris, the author of 'Hermes,' has very well observed that the demonstrating the equality of the three angles of a right-angled triangle to two right ones, would, upon the principle here stated, be a piece of wit instead of an act of the judgment or understanding, and 'Euclid's Elements' a collection of epigrams. On the contrary it has appeared, that the detection and exposure of difference, particularly where this implies nice and subtle observation, as in discriminating between pretence and practice, between appearance and reality, is common to wit and satire with judgment and reasoning, and certainly the comparing and connecting our ideas together is an essential part of reason and judgment, as well as of wit and fancy. Mere wit, as opposed to reason or argument, consists in striking out some casual and partial coincidence which has nothing to do, or at least implies no necessary connection with the nature of the things, which are forced into a seeming analogy by a play upon words, or some irrelevant conceit, as in puns, riddles, alliteration, &c. The jest, in all such cases, lies in the sort of mock-identity, or nominal resemblance, established by the inter-

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and dislike some one thing, some another, and therefore some men's thoughts run one way, some another, and are held to, and observe differently the things that pass through their imagination. And whereas in this succession of men's thoughts there is nothing to observe in the things they think on, but either in what they be like one another, or in what they be unlike, . . . those that observe their similitudes, in case they be such as are but rarely observed by others, are said to have a good wit, by which on this occasion is meant a good fancy. But they that observe their differences and dissimilitudes, which is called distinguishing and discerning, and judging between thing and thing, in case such discerning be not easy, are said to have a good judgment; and particularly in matter of conversation and business; wherein times, places, and persons are to be discerned, this virtue is called discretion. The former, that is, fancy, without the help of judgment, is not commmended for a virtue; but the latter, which is judgment or discretion, is commended for itself, without the help of fancy." 'Leviathan' [Ed. 1651] p. 32.

vention of the same words expressing different ideas, and countenancing as it were, by a fatality of language, the mischievous insinuation which the person who has the wit to take advantage of it wishes to convey. So when the disaffected French wits applied to the new order of the *Fleur du lys* the *double entendre* of *Compagnons d'Ulysse*, or companions of Ulysses, meaning the animal into which the fellow-travellers of the hero of the 'Odyssey' were transformed, this was a shrewd and biting intimation of a galling truth (if truth it were) by a fortuitous concourse of letters of the alphabet, jumping in "a foregone conclusion," but there was no proof of the thing, unless it was self-evident. And, indeed, this may be considered as the best defence of the contested maxim– That *ridicule is the test of truth;* viz., that it does not contain or attempt a formal proof of it, but owes its power of conviction to the bare suggestion of it, so that if the thing when once hinted is not clear in itself, the satire fails of its effect and falls to the ground. The sarcasm here glanced at the character of the new or old French noblesse may not be well founded; but it is so like truth, and "comes in such a questionable shape," backed with the appearance of an identical proposition, that it would require a long train of facts and laboured arguments to do away the impression, even if we were sure of the honesty and wisdom of the person who undertook to refute it. A flippant jest is as good a test of truth as a solid bribe; and there are serious sophistries,

> "Soul-killing lies, and truths that work small good,"

as well as idle pleasantries. Of this we may be sure, that ridicule fastens on the vulnerable points of a cause, and finds out the weak sides of an argument; if those who resort to it sometimes rely too much on its success, those who are chiefly annoyed by it almost always are so with reason, and cannot be too much on their guard against deserving it. Before we can laugh at a thing, its absurdity

must at least be open and palpable to common apprehension. Ridicule is necessarily built on certain supposed facts, whether true or false, and on their inconsistency with certain acknowledged maxims, whether right or wrong. It is, therefore, a fair test, if not of philosophical or abstract truth, at least of what is truth according to public opinion and common sense; for it can only expose to instantaneous contempt that which is condemned by public opinion, and is hostile to the common sense of mankind. Or to put it differently, it is the test of the quantity of truth that there is in our favourite prejudices. To show how nearly allied wit is thought to be to truth, it is not unusual to say of any person—"Such a one is a man of sense, for though he said nothing, he laughed in the right place." Alliteration comes in here under the head of a certain sort of verbal wit; or, by pointing the expression, sometimes points the sense. Mr. Grattan's wit or eloquence (I don't know by what name to call it) would be nothing without this accompaniment. Speaking of some ministers whom he did not like, he said, "Their only means of government are the guinea and the gallows." There can scarcely, it must be confessed, be a more effectual mode of political conversion than one of these applied to a man's friends, and the other to himself. The fine sarcasm of Junius on the effect of the supposed ingratitude of the Duke of Grafton at court—"The instance might be painful, but the principle would please"—notwithstanding the profound insight into human nature it implies, would hardly pass for wit without the alliteration, as some poetry would hardly be acknowledged as such without the rhyme to clench it. A quotation or a hackneyed phrase dextrously turned or wrested to another purpose, has often the effect of the liveliest wit. An idle fellow who had only fourpence left in the world, which had been put by to pay for the baking some meat for his dinner, went and laid it out to buy a new string for a

guitar. An old acquaintance on hearing this story, repeated those lines out of the 'Allegro'—

> "And ever against *eating* cares
> Lap me in soft Lydian airs."

The reply of the author of the periodical paper called the 'World' to a lady at church, who seeing him look thoughtful, asked what he was thinking of—"The next World," —is a perversion of an established formula of language, something of the same kind. Rhymes are sometimes a species of wit, where there is an alternate combination and resolution or decomposition of the elements of sound, contrary to our usual division and classification of them in ordinary speech, not unlike the sudden separation and reunion of the component parts of the machinery in a pantomime. The author who excels infinitely the most in this way is the writer of 'Hudibras.' He also excels in the invention of single words and names which have the effect of wit by sounding big, and meaning nothing:—"full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." But of the artifices of this author's burlesque style I shall have occasion to speak hereafter. It is not always easy to distinguish between the wit of words and that of things; "For thin partitions do their bounds divide." Some of the late Mr. Curran's *bon mots* or *jeux d'esprit*, might be said to owe their birth to this sort of equivocal generation; or were a happy mixture of verbal wit and a lively and picturesque fancy, of legal acuteness in detecting the variable applications of words, and of a mind apt at perceiving the ludicrous in external objects. "Do you see anything ridiculous in this wig?" said one of his brother judges to him. "Nothing but the head," was the answer. Now here instantaneous advantage was taken of the slight technical ambiguity in the construction of language, and the matter-of-fact is flung into the scale as a thumping makeweight. After all, verbal and accidental strokes of wit, though the most surprising and laughable,

are not the best and most lasting. That wit is the most refined and effectual which is founded on the detection of unexpected likeness or distinction in things, rather than in words. It is more severe and galling—that is, it is more unpardonable though less surprising, in proportion as the thought suggested is more complete and satisfactory from its being inherent in the nature of the things themselves. *Hæret lateri lethalis arundo.* Truth makes the greatest libel; and it is that which barbs the darts of wit. The Duke of Buckingham's saying, "Laws are not, like women, the worse for being old," is an instance of a harmless truism and the utmost malice of wit united. This is, perhaps, what has been meant by the distinction between true and false wit. Mr. Addison, indeed, goes so far as to make it the exclusive test of true wit that it will bear translation into another language—that is to say, that it does not depend at all on the form of expression. But this is by no means the case. Swift would hardly have allowed of such a straitlaced theory to make havoc with his darling conundrums, though there is no one whose serious wit is more that of things, as opposed to a mere play either of words or fancy. I ought, I believe, to have noticed before, in speaking of the difference between wit and humour, that wit is often pretended absurdity, where the person overacts or exaggerates a certain part with a conscious design to expose it as if it were another person, as when Mandrake in the 'Twin Rivals' says, "This glass is too big, carry it away, I'll drink out of the bottle." On the contrary, when Sir Hugh Evans says, very innocently, "'Od's plessed will, I will not be absence at the grace," though there is here a great deal of humour, there is no wit. This kind of wit of the humorist, where the person makes a butt of himself, and exhibits his own absurdities or foibles purposely in the most pointed and glaring lights, runs through the whole of the character of Falstaff, and is, in

truth, the principle on which it is founded. It is an irony directed against one's self. Wit is, in fact, a voluntary act of the mind, or exercise of the invention, showing the absurd and ludicrous consciously, whether in ourselves or another. Cross-readings, where the blunders are designed, are wit; but if any one were to light upon them through ignorance or accident, they would be merely ludicrous.

It might be made an argument of the intrinsic superiority of poetry or imagination to wit, that the former does not admit of mere verbal combinations. Whenever they do occur, they are uniformly blemishes. It requires something more solid and substantial to raise admiration or passion. The general forms and aggregate masses of our ideas must be brought more into play to give weight and magnitude. Imagination may be said to be the finding out something similar in things generally alike, or with like feelings attached to them; while wit principally aims at finding out something that seems the same, or amounts to a momentary deception where you least expected it, namely, in things totally opposite. The reason why more slight and partial, or merely accidental and nominal resemblances serve the purposes of wit, and indeed characterise its essence as a distinct operation and faculty of the mind, is, that the object of ludicrous poetry is naturally to let down and lessen; and it is easier to let down than to raise up; to weaken than to strengthen; to disconnect our sympathy from passion and power, than to attach and rivet it to any object of grandeur or interest; to startle and shock our preconceptions by incongruous and equivocal combinations, than to confirm, enforce, and expand them by powerful and lasting associations of ideas, or striking and true analogies. A slight cause is sufficient to produce a slight effect. To be indifferent or sceptical, requires no effort; to be enthusiastic and in earnest, requires a strong impulse and

collective power. Wit and humour (comparatively speaking, or taking the extremes to judge of the gradations by) appeal to our indolence, our vanity, our weakness, and insensibility; serious and impassioned poetry appeals to our strength, our magnanimity, our virtue, and humanity. Anything is sufficient to heap contempt upon an object; even the bare suggestion of a mischievous allusion to what is improper dissolves the whole charm, and puts an end to our admiration of the sublime or beautiful. Reading the finest passage in Milton's 'Paradise Lost' in a false tone, will make it seem insipid and absurd. The cavilling at, or invidiously pointing out, a few slips of the pen, will embitter the pleasure, or alter our opinion of a whole work, and make us throw it down in disgust. The critics are aware of this vice and infirmity in our nature, and play upon it with periodical success. The meanest weapons are strong enough for this kind of warfare, and the meanest hands can wield them. Spleen can subsist on any kind of food. The shadow of a doubt, the hint of an inconsistency, a word, a look, a syllable, will destroy our best-formed convictions. What puts this argument in as striking a point of view as anything, is the nature of parody or burlesque, the secret of which lies merely in transposing or applying at a venture to anything, or to the lowest objects, that which is applicable only to certain given things, or to the highest matters. "From the sublime to the ridiculous there is but one step." The slightest want of unity of impression destroys the sublime; the detection of the smallest incongruity is an infallible ground to rest the ludicrous upon. But in serious poetry, which aims at riveting our affections, every blow must tell home. The missing a single time is fatal, and undoes the spell. We see how difficult it is to sustain a continued flight of impressive sentiment: how easy it must be then to travestie or burlesque it, to flounder into nonsense, and be

witty by playing the fool. It is a common mistake, however, to suppose that parodies degrade, or imply a stigma on the subject; on the contrary, they in general imply something serious or sacred in the originals. Without this, they would be good for nothing, for the immediate contrast would be wanting, and with this they are sure to tell. The best parodies are, accordingly, the best and most striking things reversed. Witness the common travesties of Homer and Virgil. Mr. Canning's court parodies on Mr. Southey's popular odes, are also an instance in point (I do not know which were the cleverest); and the best of the 'Rejected Addresses' is the parody on Crabbe, though I do not certainly think that Crabbe is the most ridiculous poet now living.*

Lear and the Fool are the sublimest instance I know of passion and wit united, or of imagination unfolding the most tremendous sufferings, and of burlesque on passion playing with it, aiding and relieving its intensity by the most pointed, but familiar and indifferent illustrations of the same thing in different objects, and on a meaner scale. The Fool's reproaching Lear with "making his daughters his mothers," his snatches of proverbs and old ballads, "The hedge-sparrow fed the cuckoo so long, that it had its head bit off by its young," and "Whoop jug, I know when the horse follows the cart," are a running commentary of trite truisms, pointing out the extreme folly of the infatuated old monarch, and in a manner reconciling us to its inevitable consequences.

Lastly, there is a wit of sense and observation, which consists in the acute illustration of good sense and practical wisdom, by means of some far-fetched conceit or quaint imagery. The matter is sense, but the form is wit. Thus the lines in Pope—

> "'Tis with our judgments as our watches, none
> Go just alike; yet each believes his own—"

* This was written in 1818.—Ed.

are witty, rather than poetical; because the truth they convey is a mere dry observation on human life, without elevation or enthusiasm, and the illustration of it is of that quaint and familiar kind that is merely curious and fanciful. Cowley is an instance of the same kind in almost all his writings. Many of the jests and witticisms in the best comedies are moral aphorisms and rules for the conduct of life, sparkling with wit and fancy in the mode of expression. The ancient philosophers also abounded in the same kind of wit, in telling home truths in the most unexpected manner. In this sense Æsop was the greatest wit and moralist that ever lived. Ape and slave, he looked askance at human nature, and beheld its weaknesses and errors transferred to another species. Vice and virtue were to him as plain as any objects of sense. He saw in man a talking, absurd, obstinate, proud, angry animal; and clothed these abstractions with wings, or a beak, or tail, or claws, or long ears, as they appeared embodied in these hieroglyphics in the brute creation. His moral philosophy is natural history. He makes an ass bray wisdom, and a frog croak humanity. The store of moral truth, and the fund of invention in exhibiting it in eternal forms, palpable and intelligible, and delightful to children and grown persons, and to all ages and nations, are almost miraculous. The invention of a fable is to me the most enviable exertion of human genius: it is the discovering a truth to which there is no clue, and which, when once found out, can never be forgotten. I would rather have been the author of 'Æsop's Fables,' than of 'Euclid's Elements!' That popular entertainment, Punch and the Puppet-show, owes part of its irresistible and universal attraction to nearly the same principle of inspiring inanimate and mechanical agents with sense and consciousness. The drollery and wit of a piece of wood is doubly droll and farcical. Punch is not merry in himself, but "he is the cause of heartfelt mirth in other men."

The wires and pulleys that govern his motions are conductors to carry off the spleen, and all "that perilous stuff that weighs upon the heart." If we see a number of people turning the corner of a street, ready to burst with secret satisfaction, and with their faces bathed in laughter, we know what is the matter—that they are just come from a puppet-show. Who can see three little painted, patched-up figures, no bigger than one's thumb, strut, squeak and gibber, sing, dance, chatter, scold, knock one another about the head, give themselves airs of importance, and "imitate humanity most abominably," without laughing immoderately? We overlook the farce and mummery of human life in little, and for nothing; and what is still better, it costs them who have to play in it nothing. We place the mirth, and glee, and triumph, to our own account; and we know that the bangs and blows they have received go for nothing, as soon as the showman puts them up in his box and marches off quietly with them, as jugglers of a less amusing description sometimes march off with the wrongs and rights of mankind in their pockets! —I have heard no bad judge of such matters say, that "he liked a comedy better than a tragedy, a farce better than a comedy, a pantomime better than a farce, but a puppet-show best of all." I look upon it, that he who invented puppet-shows was a greater benefactor to his species than he who invented operas!

I shall conclude this imperfect and desultory sketch of wit and humour with Barrow's celebrated description of the same subject. He says,—"But first it may be demanded, what the thing we speak of is, or what this facetiousness doth import; to which question I might reply, as Democritus did to him that asked the definition of a man—*'tis that which we all see and know;* and one better apprehends what it is by acquaintance, than I can inform him by description. It is, indeed, a thing so versatile and multiform, appearing in so many shapes, so

many postures, so many garbs, so variously apprehended by several eyes and judgments, that it seemeth no less hard to settle a clear and certain notice thereof, than to make a portrait of Proteus, or to define the figure of fleeting air. Sometimes it lieth in pat allusion to a known story, or in seasonable application of a trivial saying, or in forging an apposite tale: sometimes it playeth in words and phrases, taking advantage from the ambiguity of their sense, or the affinity of their sound: sometimes it is wrapped in a dress of luminous expression; sometimes it lurketh under an odd similitude. Sometimes it is lodged in a sly question, in a smart answer; in a quirkish reason; in a shrewd intimation; in cunningly diverting or cleverly restoring an objection: sometimes it is couched in a bold scheme of speech; in a tart irony; in a lusty hyperbole; in a startling metaphor; in a plausible reconciling of contradictions, or in acute nonsense: sometimes a scenical representation of persons or things, a counterfeit speech, a mimical look or gesture passeth for it; sometimes an affected simplicity, sometimes a presumptuous bluntness giveth it being; sometimes it riseth only from a lucky hitting upon what is strange: sometimes from a crafty wresting obvious matter to the purpose: often it consisteth in one knows not what, and springeth up one can hardly tell how. Its ways are unaccountable and inexplicable, being answerable to the numberless rovings of fancy and windings of language. It is, in short, a manner of speaking out of the simple and plain way (such as reason teacheth and knoweth things by), which by a pretty surprising uncouthness in conceit or expression doth affect and amuse the fancy, showing in it some wonder, and breathing some delight thereto. It raiseth admiration, as signifying a nimble sagacity of apprehension, a special felicity of invention, a vivacity of spirit, and reach of wit more than vulgar: it seeming to argue a rare quickness of parts, that one can fetch in

remote conceits applicable; a notable skill that he can dextrously accommodate them to a purpose before him, together with a lively briskness of humour, not apt to damp those sportful flashes of imagination. (Whence in Aristotle such persons are termed επιδεξιοι, dextrous men and ευτροποι, men of facile or versatile manners, who can easily turn themselves to all things, or turn all things to themselves.) It also procureth delight by gratifying curiosity with its rareness or semblance of difficulty (as monsters, not for their beauty but their rarity; as juggling tricks, not for their use but their abstruseness, are beheld with pleasure); by diverting the mind from its road of serious thoughts; by instilling gaiety and airiness of spirit; by provoking to such dispositions of spirit, in way of emulation or complaisance, and by seasoning matter, otherwise distasteful or insipid, with an unusual and thence grateful tang."*

I will only add by way of general caution, that there is nothing more ridiculous than laughter without a cause, nor anything more troublesome than what are called laughing people. A professed laugher is as contemptible and tiresome a character as a professed wit: the one is always contriving something to laugh at, the other is always laughing at nothing. An excess of levity is as impertinent as an excess of gravity. A character of this sort is well personified by Spenser, in the 'Damsel of the Idle Lake'—

> "————Who did assay
> To laugh at shaking of the leavés light."

Any one must be mainly ignorant or thoughtless, who is surprised at everything he sees; or wonderfully conceited, who expects everything to conform to his standard of propriety. Clowns and idiots laugh on all occasions; and the common failing of wishing to be thought satirical often runs through whole families in country places, to

* 'Barrow's Works,' Serm. 14.

the great annoyance of their neighbours. To be struck with incongruity in whatever comes before us, does not argue great comprehension or refinement of perception, but rather a looseness and flippancy of mind and temper, which prevents the individual from connecting any two ideas steadily or consistently together. It is owing to a natural crudity and precipitateness of the imagination, which assimilates nothing properly to itself. People who are always laughing, at length laugh on the wrong side of their faces, for they cannot get others to laugh with them. In like manner, an affectation of wit by degrees hardens the heart, and spoils good company and good manners. A perpetual succession of good things puts an end to common conversation. There is no answer to a jest, but another; and even where the ball can be kept up in this way without ceasing, it tires the patience of the by-standers, and runs the speakers out of breath. Wit is the salt of conversation, not the food.

The four chief names for comic humour out of our own language are Aristophanes and Lucian among the ancients, Molière and Rabelais among the moderns. Of the two first I shall say, for I know, but little. I should have liked Aristophanes better, if he had treated Socrates less scurvily, for he has treated him most scurvily both as to wit and argument. His Plutus and his Birds are striking instances, the one of dry humour, the other of airy fancy. Lucian is a writer who appears to deserve his full fame: he has the licentious and extravagant wit of Rabelais, but directed more uniformly to a purpose; and his comic productions are interspersed with beautiful and eloquent descriptions, full of sentiment, such as the exquisite account of the fable of the halcyon put into the mouth of Socrates, and the heroic eulogy on Bacchus, which is conceived in the highest strain of glowing panegyric.

The two other authors I proposed to mention are modern, and French. Molière, however in the spirit

of his writings, is almost as much an English as a French author—quite a *barbare* in all in which he really excelled. He was unquestionably one of the greatest comic geniuses that ever lived; a man of infinite wit, gaiety, and invention—full of life, laughter, and whim. But it cannot be denied, that his plays are in general mere farces, without scrupulous adherence to nature, refinement of character, or common probability. The plots of several of them could not be carried on for a moment without a perfect collusion between the parties to wink at contradictions, and act in defiance of the evidence of their senses. For instance, take the *Medecin malgrè lui* (the 'Mock Doctor'), in which a common wood-cutter takes upon himself, and is made successfully to support through a whole play, the character of a learned physician, without exciting the least suspicion; and yet, notwithstanding the absurdity of the plot, it is one of the most laughable and truly comic productions that can well be imagined. The rest of his lighter pieces, the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, *Monsieur Pourceaugnac*, *George Dandin* (or 'Barnaby Brittle'), &c., are of the same description—gratuitous assumptions of character, and fanciful and outrageous caricatures of nature. He indulges at his peril in the utmost license of burlesque exaggeration, and gives a loose to the intoxication of his animal spirits. With respect to his two most laboured comedies, the 'Tartuffe' and 'Misanthrope,' I confess that I find them rather hard to get through: they have much of the improbability and extravagance of the others, united with the endless common-place prosing of French declamation. What can exceed, for example, the absurdity of the Misanthrope, who leaves his mistress, after every proof of her attachment and constancy, for no other reason than that she will not submit to the *technical formality* of going to live with him in a wilderness? The characters, again, which Celimene gives of her female friends, near the opening of the play, are admirable satires,

(as good as Pope's characters of women), but not exactly in the spirit of comic dialogue. The strictures of Rousseau on this play, in his Letter to D'Alembert, are a fine specimen of the best philosophical criticism. The same remarks apply in a greater degree to the 'Tartuffe.' The long speeches and reasonings in this play tire one almost to death: they may be very good logic, or rhetoric, or philosophy, or anything but comedy. If each of the parties had retained a special pleader to speak his sentiments, they could not have appeared more verbose or intricate. The improbability of the character of Orgon is wonderful. This play is in one point of view invaluable, as a lasting monument of the credulity of the French to all verbal professions of wisdom or virtue; and its existence can only be accounted for from that astonishing and tyrannical predominance which words exercise over things in the mind of every Frenchman. The *Ecole des Femmes*, from which Wycherley has borrowed his 'Country Wife,' with the true spirit of original genius,* is, in my judgment, the masterpiece of Molière. The set speeches in the original play, it is true, would not be borne on the English stage, nor indeed on the French, but that they are carried off by the verse. The *Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes*, the dialogue of which is prose, is written in a very different style. Among other things, this little piece contains an exquisite, and almost unanswerable defence of the superiority of comedy over tragedy. Molière was to be excused for taking this side of the question.

A writer of some pretensions among ourselves has reproached the French with "an equal want of books and men." There is a common French print, in which Molière is represented reading one of his plays in the presence of the celebrated Ninon de l'Enclos, to a circle of the wits and first men of his own time. Among these are the

* Truly: for the drama has been said to be the best picture extant of the dissolute manners of the court of Charles II.—Ed.

great Corneille; the tender, faultless Racine; Fontaine, the artless old man, unconscious of immortality; the accomplished St. Evremond; the Duke de la Rochefocault, the severe anatomiser of the human breast; Boileau, the flatterer of courts and judge of men! Were these men nothing? They have passed for men (and great ones) hitherto, and though the prejudice is an old one, I should hope it may still last our time.

Rabelais is another name that might have saved this unjust censure. The wise sayings and heroic deeds of Gargantua and Pantagruel ought not to be set down as nothing. I have already spoken my mind at large of this author; but I cannot help thinking of him here, sitting in his easy chair, with an eye languid with excess of mirth, his lip quivering with a new-born conceit, and wiping his beard after a well-seasoned jest, with his pen held carelessly in his hand, his wine-flagons, and his books of law, of school divinity, and physic, before him, which were his jest-books, whence he drew endless stores of absurdity; laughing at the world and enjoying it by turns, and making the world laugh with him again, for the last three hundred years, at his teeming wit and its own prolific follies. Even to those who have never read his works, the name of Rabelais is a cordial to the spirits, and the mention of it cannot consist with gravity or spleen!

LECTURE II.

ON SHAKSPEARE AND BEN JONSON.

Dr. Johnson thought Shakspeare's comedies better than his tragedies, and gives as a reason, that he was more at home in the one than in the other. That comedies should be written in a more easy and careless vein than tragedies is but natural. This is only saying that a comedy is not so serious a thing as a tragedy. But that he showed a greater mastery in the one than the other, I cannot allow, nor is it generally felt. The labour which the Doctor thought it cost Shakspeare to write his tragedies, only showed the labour which it cost the critic in reading them, that is, his general indisposition to sympathise heartily and spontaneously with works of high-wrought passion or imagination. There is not in any part of this author's writings the slightest trace of his having ever been "smit with the love of sacred song," except some passages in Pope. His habitually morbid temperament and saturnine turn of thought required that the string should rather be relaxed than tightened, that the weight upon the mind should rather be taken off than have anything added to it. There was a sluggish moroseness about his moral constitution that refused to be roused to any keen agony of thought, and that was not very safely to be trifled with in lighter matters, though this last was allowed to pass off as the most pardonable offence against the gravity of his pretensions. It is in fact the established rule at present, in these cases, to speak highly of the Doctor's authority, and to dissent from almost every one

of his critical decisions. For my own part I so far consider this preference given to the comic genius of the poet as erroneous and unfounded, that I should say that he is the only tragic poet in the world in the highest sense, as being on a par with, and the same as, Nature in her greatest heights and depths of action and suffering. There is but one who durst walk within that mighty circle, treading the utmost bound of nature and passion, showing us the dread abyss of woe in all its ghastly shapes and colours, and laying open all the faculties of the human soul to act, to think, and suffer, in direst extremities; whereas I think, on the other hand, that in comedy, though his talents there too were as wonderful as they were delightful, yet that there were some before him, others on a level with him, and many close behind him. I cannot help thinking, for instance, that Molière was as great or a greater comic genius than Shakspeare, though assuredly I do not think that Racine was as great or a greater tragic genius. I think that both Rabelais and Cervantes, the one in the power of ludicrous description, the other in the invention and perfect keeping of comic character, excelled Shakspeare; that is, they would have been greater men, if they had had equal power with him over the stronger passions. For my own reading, I like Vanbrugh's 'City Wives' Confederacy' as well, or ("not to speak it profanely") better than the 'Merry Wives of Windsor,' and Congreve's 'Way of the World' as well as the 'Comedy of Errors' or 'Love's Labour Lost.' But I cannot say that I know of any tragedies in the world that make even a tolerable approach to 'Hamlet,' or 'Lear,' or 'Othello,' or some others, either in the sum total of their effect, or in their complete distinctness from everything else, by which they take not only unquestioned, but undivided possession of the mind, and form a class, a world by themselves, mingling with all our thoughts like a second being. Other tragedies tell

for more or less, are good, bad, or indifferent, as they have more or less excellence of a kind common to them with others; but these stand alone by themselves; they have nothing common-place in them; they are a new power in the imagination, they tell for their whole amount, they measure from the ground. There is not only nothing so good (in my judgment) as 'Hamlet,' or 'Lear,' or 'Othello,' or 'Macbeth,' but there is nothing like 'Hamlet,' or 'Lear,' or 'Othello,' or 'Macbeth.' There is nothing, I believe, in the majestic Corneille, equal to the stern pride of 'Coriolanus,' or which gives such an idea of the crumbling in pieces of the Roman grandeur, "like an unsubstantial pageant faded," as the 'Antony and Cleopatra.' But to match the best serious comedies, such as Molière's 'Misanthrope' and his 'Tartuffe,' we must go to Shakspeare's tragic characters, the 'Timon of Athens' or honest Iago, when we shall more than succeed. He put his strength into his tragedies, and played with comedy. He was greatest in what was greatest; and his *forte* was not trifling, according to the opinion here combated, even though he might do that as well as any one else, unless he could do it better than anybody else. I would not be understood to say that there are not scenes or whole characters in Shakspeare equal in wit and drollery to anything upon record. Falstaff alone is an instance which, if I would, I could not get over. "He is the leviathan of all the creatures of the author's comic genius, and tumbles about his unwieldy bulk in an ocean of wit and humour." But in general it will be found (if I am not mistaken) that even in the very best of these, the spirit of humanity and the fancy of the poet greatly prevail over the mere wit and satire, and that we sympathise with his characters oftener than we laugh at them. His ridicule wants the sting of ill-nature. He had hardly such a thing as spleen in his composition. Falstaff himself is so great a joke, rather from his being so huge a

mass of enjoyment than of absurdity. His reappearance* in the 'Merry Wives of Windsor' is not "a consummation devoutly to be wished," for we do not take pleasure in the repeated triumphs over him. Mercutio's quips and banter upon his friends show amazing gaiety, frankness, and volubility of tongue, but we think no more of them when the poet takes the words out of his mouth, and gives the description of Queen Mab. Touchstone, again, is a shrewd, biting fellow, a lively mischievous wag; but still what are his gibing sentences and chopped logic to the fine moralizing vein of the fantastical Jacques, stretched beneath "the shade of melancholy boughs?" Nothing. That is, Shakspeare was a greater poet than wit; his imagination was the leading and master-quality of his mind, which was always ready to soar into its native element: the ludicrous was only secondary and subordinate. In the comedies of gallantry and intrigue, with what freshness and delight we come to the serious and romantic parts! What a relief they are to the mind, after those of mere ribaldry or mirth! Those in 'Twelfth Night,' for instance, and 'Much Ado about Nothing,' where Olivia and Hero are concerned, throw even Malvolio and Sir Toby, and Benedick and Beatrice, into the shade. They "give a very echo to the seat where love is throned." What he has said of music might be said of his own poetry—

> "Oh! it came o'er the ear like the sweet south
> Breathing upon a bank of violets,
> Stealing and giving odour."

How poor, in general, what a falling-off, these parts seem in mere comic authors; how ashamed we are of them; and how fast we hurry the blank verse over, that we may get upon safe ground again, and recover our good opinion

* *i.e.* After having figured in four of the historical plays, 'Henry IV.,' Parts I. and II., 'Henry V.,' and First Part of 'Henry VI.'—Ed.

of the author! A striking and lamentable instance of this may be found (by any one who chooses) in the high-flown speeches in Sir Richard Steele's 'Conscious Lovers.' As good an example as any of this informing and redeeming power in our author's genius might be taken from the comic scenes in both parts of 'Henry IV.' Nothing can go much lower in intellect or morals than many of the characters. Here are knaves and fools in abundance, of the meanest order, and stripped stark-naked. But genius, like charity, "covers a multitude of sins;" we pity as much as we despise them; in spite of our disgust we like them, because they like themselves, and because we are made to sympathise with them; and the ligament, fine as it is, which links them to humanity, is never broken. Who would quarrel with Wart or Feeble, or Mouldy or Bull-calf,* or even with Pistol, Nym, or Bardolph? None but a hypocrite. The severe censurers of the morals of imaginary characters can generally find a hole for their own vices to creep out at; and yet do not perceive how it is that the imperfect and even deformed characters in Shakspeare's plays, as done to the life, by forming a part of our personal consciousness, claim our personal forgiveness, and suspend or evade our moral judgment, by bribing our self-love to side with them. Not to do so, is not morality, but affectation, stupidity, or ill-nature. I have more sympathy with one of Shakspeare's pick-purses, Gadshill or Peto, than I can possibly have with any member of the Society for the Suppression of Vice, and would by no means assist to deliver the one into the hands of the other. Those who cannot be persuaded to draw a veil over the foibles of ideal characters, may be suspected of wearing a mask over their own! Again, in point of understanding and attainments, Shallow sinks low enough; and yet his cousin Silence is a foil to him; he is the shadow of a shade, glimmers on the very verge

* Characters in the Second Part of 'Henry IV.'—Ed.

of downright imbecility, and totters on the brink of nothing. "He has been merry twice or once ere now," and is hardly persuaded to break his silence in a song. Shallow has "heard the chimes at midnight," and roared out glees and catches at taverns and inns of court, when he was young. So, at least, he tells his cousin Silence, and Falstaff encourages the loftiness of his pretensions. Shallow would be thought a great man among his dependants and followers; Silence is nobody—not even in his own opinion: yet he sits in the orchard, and eats his caraways and pippins among the rest. Shakspeare takes up the meanest subjects with the same tenderness that we do an insect's wing, and would not kill a fly. To give a more particular instance of what I mean, I will take the inimitable and affecting, though most absurd and ludicrous dialogue, between Shallow and Silence, on the death of old Double.*

"*Shallow.* Come on, come on, come on, Sir; give me your hand, Sir; give me your hand, Sir; an early stirrer, by the rood. And how doth my good cousin Silence?

Silence. Good morrow, good cousin Shallow.

Shallow. And how doth my cousin, your bedfellow? and your fairest daughter, and mine, my god-daughter Ellen?

Silence. Alas! a black ousel, cousin Shallow.

Shallow. By yea and nay, Sir, I dare say my cousin William is become a good scholar: he is at Oxford still, is he not?

Silence. Indeed, Sir, to my cost.

Shallow. 'A must then to the Inns of Court shortly. I was once of Clement's-Inn; where, I think, they will talk of mad Shallow yet.

Silence. You were called lusty Shallow then, cousin.

Shallow. I was called any thing, and I would have done any thing indeed, too, and roundly too. There was I, and little John Doit of Staffordshire, and black George Bare, and Francis Pickbone, and Will Squele, a Cots'ol' man, you had not four such swinge-bucklers in all the Inns o' Court again; and I may say to you, we knew where the bona-robas were, and had the best of them all at commandment. Then was Jack Falstaff (now Sir John) a boy, and page to Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk.†

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* Second Part of 'Henry IV.,' iii. 2 (Dyce's 2nd edit., iv. 355).—Ed.

† See Dyce's 'Shakspeare,' 2nd edit., iv. 204.—Ed.

Silence. This Sir John, cousin, that comes hither anon about soldiers?

Shallow. The same Sir John, the very same. I saw him break Skogan's head at the court-gate, when he was a crack not thus high; and the very same day did I fight with one Sampson Stockfish, a fruiterer, behind Gray's-Inn. Jesu, Jesu! the mad days that I have spent! and to see how many of mine old acquaintance are dead!

Silence. We shall all follow, cousin.

Shallow. Certain, 'tis certain, very sure, very sure: death (as the Psalmist saith) is certain to all, all shall die.—How a good yoke of bullocks at Stamford fair?

Silence. Truly, cousin, I was not there.

Shallow. Death is certain. Is old Double of your town living yet?

Silence. Dead, Sir.

Shallow. Jesu, Jesu, dead! 'a drew a good bow: and dead? 'a shot a fine shoot. John o' Gaunt loved him well, and betted much money on his head. Dead! 'a would have clapped i'th' clout at twelve score; and carried you a fore-hand shaft a fourteen and a fourteen and a half, that it would have done a man's heart good to see.—How a score of ewes now?

Silence. Thereafter as they be: a score of good ewes may be worth ten pounds.

Shallow. And is old Double dead?"

There is not anything more characteristic than this in all Shakspeare. A finer sermon on mortality was never preached. We see the frail condition of human life, and the weakness of the human understanding in Shallow's reflections on it; who, while the past is sliding from beneath his feet, still clings to the present. The meanest circumstances are shown through an atmosphere of abstraction that dignifies them: their very insignificance makes them more affecting, for they instantly put a check on our aspiring thoughts, and remind us that, seen through that dim perspective, the difference between the great and little, the wise and foolish, is not much. "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin:" and old Double, though his exploits had been greater, could but have had his day. There is a pathetic *naivetè* mixed up with Shallow's common-place reflections and impertinent digres-

sions. The reader laughs (as well he may) in reading the passage, but he lays down the book to think. The wit, however diverting, is social and humane. But this is not the distinguishing characteristic of wit, which is generally provoked by folly, and spends its venom upon vice.

The fault, then, of Shakspeare's comic Muse is, in my opinion, that it is too good-natured and magnanimous. It mounts above its quarry. It is "apprehensive, quick, forgetive, full of nimble, fiery, and delectable shapes;" but it does not take the highest pleasure in making human nature look as mean, as ridiculous, and contemptible as possible. It is in this respect chiefly that it differs from the comedy of a later, and (what is called) a more refined period. Genteel comedy is the comedy of fashionable life, and of artificial character and manners. The most pungent ridicule is that which is directed to mortify vanity and to expose affectation; but vanity and affectation, in their most exorbitant and studied excesses, are the ruling principles of society only in a highly advanced state of civilization and manners. Man can hardly be said to be a truly contemptible animal, till, from the facilities of general intercourse and the progress of example and opinion, he becomes the ape of the extravagances of other men. The keenest edge of satire is required to distinguish between the true and false pretensions to taste and elegance; its lash is laid on with the utmost severity, to drive before it the common herd of knaves and fools, not to lacerate and terrify the single stragglers. In a word, it is when folly is epidemic, and vice worn as a mark of distinction, that all the malice of wit and humour is called out and justified to detect the imposture, and prevent the contagion from spreading. The fools in Wycherley and Congreve are of their own, or one another's making, and deserve to be well scourged into common sense and decency: the fools in Shakspeare are of his own or nature's making; and it would be unfair

to probe to the quick, or hold up to unqualified derision, the faults which are involuntary and incorrigible, or those which you yourself encourage and exaggerate from the pleasure you take in witnessing them. Our later comic writers represent a state of manners, in which to be a man of wit and pleasure about town was become the fashion, and in which the swarms of egregious pretenders in both kinds openly kept one another in countenance, and were become a public nuisance. Shakspeare, living in a state of greater rudeness and simplicity, chiefly gave certain characters which were a kind of *grotesques*, or solitary excrescences growing up out of their native soil without affectation, and which he undertook kindly to pamper for the public entertainment. For instance, Sir Andrew Aguecheek is evidently a creature of the poet's own fancy. The author lends occasion to his absurdity to show itself as much as he pleases, devises antics for him which would not enter into his own head, makes him "go to church in a galliard, and return home in a coranto;" adds fuel to his folly, or throws cold water on his courage; makes his puny extravagances venture out or slink into corners without asking his leave; encourages them into indiscreet luxuriance, or checks them in the bud, just as it suits him, for the jest's sake. The gratification of the fancy, "and furnishing matter for innocent mirth," are, therefore, the chief object of this and other characters like it, rather than reforming the moral sense, or indulging our personal spleen. But Tattle and Sparkish,* who are fops cast not in the mould of fancy, but of fashion, who have a tribe of forerunners and followers, who catch certain diseases of the mind on purpose to communicate the infection, and are screened in their preposterous eccentricities by their own conceit and by the world's opinion, are entitled to no quarter, and receive none. They think themselves objects of envy and admi-

* Characters in Congreve's 'Love for Love.'—Ed.

ration, and on that account are doubly objects of our contempt and ridicule. We find that the scenes of Shakspeare's comedies are mostly laid in the country, or are transferable there at pleasure. The genteel comedy exists only in towns, and crowds of borrowed characters, who copy others as the satirist copies them, and who are only seen to be despised. "All beyond Hyde Park is a desert to it:" while there the pastoral and poetic comedy begins to vegetate and flourish, unpruned, idle, and fantastic. It is hard to "lay waste a country gentleman" in a state of nature, whose humours may have run a little wild or to seed, or to lay violent hands on a young booby 'squire, whose absurdities have not yet arrived at years of discretion: but my Lord Foppington,* who is "the prince of coxcombs," and "proud of being at the head of so prevailing a party," deserves his fate. I am not for going so far as to pronounce Shakspeare's "manners damnable, because he had not seen the court;" but I think that comedy does not find its richest harvest till individual infirmities have passed into general manners, and it is the example of courts chiefly, that stamps folly with credit and currency, or glosses over vice with meretricious lustre. I conceive, therefore, that the golden period of our comedy was just after the age of Charles II., when the town first became tainted with the affectation of the manners and conversation of fashionable life, and before the distinction between rusticity and elegance, art and nature, was lost (as it afterwards was) in a general diffusion of knowledge, and the reciprocal advantages of civil intercourse. It is to be remarked, that the union of the three gradations of artificial elegance and courtly accomplishments in one class, of the affectation of them in another, and of absolute rusticity in a third, forms the highest point of perfection of the comedies of this period,

* A well-known character in Vanbrugh's comedy of the 'Relapse.'—Ed.

as we may see in Vanbrugh's Lord Foppington, Sir Tunbelly Clumsy, and Miss Hoyden; Lady Townly, Count Basset, and John Moody; in Congreve's Millamant, Lady Wishfort, Witwoud, Sir Wilful Witwoud, and the rest.

In another point of view, or with respect to that part of comedy which relates to gallantry and intrigue, the difference between Shakspeare's comic heroines and those of a later period may be referred to the same distinction between natural and artificial life, between the world of fancy and the world of fashion. The refinements of romantic passion arise out of the imagination brooding over "airy nothing," or over a favourite object, where "love's golden shaft hath killed the flock of all affections else:" whereas the refinements of this passion in genteel comedy, or in every-day life, may be said to arise out of repeated observation and experience, diverting and frittering away the first impressions of things by a multiplicity of objects, and producing, not enthusiasm, but fastidiousness or giddy dissipation. For the one a comparatively rude age and strong feelings are best fitted; for "there the mind must minister to itself:" to the other, the progress of society and a knowledge of the world are essential; for here the effect does not depend on leaving the mind concentred in itself, but on the wear and tear of the heart, amidst the complex and rapid movements of the artificial machinery of society, and on the arbitrary subjection of the natural course of the affections to every slightest fluctuation of fashion, caprice, or opinion. Thus Olivia, in 'Twelfth Night,' has but one admirer of equal rank with herself, and but one love, to whom she innocently plights her hand and heart; or if she had a thousand lovers, she would be the sole object of their adoration and burning vows, without a rival. The heroine of romance and poetry sits secluded in the bowers of fancy, sole queen and arbitress of all hearts; and as the character is one of imagination, "of solitude and

melancholy musing born," so it may be best drawn from the imagination. Millamant, in the 'Way of the World,' on the contrary, who is the fine lady or heroine of comedy, has so many lovers, that she surfeits on admiration, till it becomes indifferent to her; so many rivals, that she is forced to put on a thousand airs of languid affectation to mortify and vex them more; so many offers, that she at last gives her hand to the man of her heart, rather to escape the persecution of their addresses, and out of levity and disdain, than from any serious choice of her own. This is a comic character; its essence consists in making light of things from familiarity and use, and as it is formed by habit and outward circumstances, so it requires actual observation, and an acquaintance with the modes of artificial life, to describe it with the utmost possible grace and precision. Congreve, who had every other opportunity, was but a young man when he wrote this character; and that makes the miracle the greater.

I do not, in short, consider comedy as exactly an affair of the heart or the imagination; and it is for this reason only that I think Shakspeare's comedies deficient. I do not, however, wish to give a preference to * any comedies over his; but I do perceive a difference between his comedies and some others that are, notwithstanding, excellent in their way, and I have endeavoured to point out in what this difference consists, as well as I could. Finally, I will not say that he had not as great a natural genius for comedy as any one; but I may venture to say, that he had not the same artificial models and regulated mass of fashionable absurdity or elegance to work upon.

The superiority of Shakspeare's natural genius for comedy cannot be better shown than by a comparison between his comic characters and those of Ben Jonson. The matter is the same: but how different is the manner! The one gives fair play to nature and his own genius,

* Original reads *of*.—Ed.

while the other trusts almost entirely to imitation and custom. Shakspeare takes his groundwork in individual character and the manners of his age, and raises from them a fantastical and delightful superstructure of his own: the other takes the same groundwork in matter-of-fact, but hardly ever rises above it; and the more he strives, is but the more enveloped "in the crust of formality" and the crude circumstantials of his subject. His genius (not to profane an old and still venerable name, but merely to make myself understood) resembles the grub more than the butterfly, plods and grovels on, wants wings to wanton in the idle summer's air, and catch the golden light of poetry. Ben Jonson is a great borrower from the works of others, and a plagiarist even from nature: so little freedom is there in his imitations of her, and he appears to receive her bounty like an alms. His works read like translations, from a certain cramp manner, and want of adaptation. Shakspeare, even when he takes whole passages from books, does it with a spirit, felicity, and mastery over his subject, that instantly makes them his own; and shows more independence of mind and original thinking in what he plunders without scruple, than Ben Jonson often did in his most studied passages, forced from the sweat and labour of his brain. His style is as dry, as literal, and meagre, as Shakspeare's is exuberant, liberal, and unrestrained. The one labours hard, lashes himself up, and produces little pleasure with all his fidelity and tenaciousness of purpose: the other, without putting himself to any trouble, or thinking about his success, performs wonders,—

> "Does mad and fantastic execution,
> Engaging and redeeming of himself,
> With such a careless force and forceless* care,
> As if that luck, in very spite of cunning,
> Bad him win all."

* Unforced.

There are people who cannot taste olives—and I cannot much relish Ben Jonson, though I have taken some pains to do it, and went to the task with every sort of good-will. I do not deny his power or his merit; far from it: but it is to me of a repulsive and unamiable kind. He was a great man in himself, but one cannot readily sympathize with him. His works, as the characteristic productions of an individual mind, or as records of the manners of a particular age, cannot be valued too highly; but they have little charm for the mere general reader. Schlegel observes, that whereas Shakspeare gives the springs of human nature, which are always the same, or sufficiently so to be interesting and intelligible: Jonson chiefly gives the *humours* of men, as connected with certain arbitrary or conventional modes of dress, action, and expression, which are intelligible only while they last, and not very interesting at any time. Shakspeare's characters are men; Ben Jonson's are more like machines, governed by mere routine, or by the convenience of the poet, whose property they are. In reading the one, we are let into the minds of his characters, we see the play of their thoughts, how their humours flow and work: the author takes a range over nature, and has an eye to every object or occasion that presents itself to set off and heighten the ludicrous character he is describing. His humour (so to speak) bubbles, sparkles, and finds its way in all directions, like a natural spring. In Ben Jonson it is, as it were, confined in a leaden cistern, where it stagnates and corrupts; or [is] directed only through certain artificial pipes and conduits, to answer a given purpose. The comedy of this author is far from being "lively, audible, and full of vent:" it is for the most part obtuse, obscure, forced, and tedious. He wears out a jest to the last shred and coarsest grain. His imagination fastens instinctively on some one mark or sign by which he designates the individual, and never lets it go, for fear of not meeting with any other means to

express himself by. A cant phrase, an odd gesture, an old-fashioned regimental uniform, a wooden leg, a tobacco-box, or a hacked sword, are the standing topics by which he embodies his characters to the imagination. They are cut and dried comedy; the letter, not the spirit of wit and humour. Each of his characters has a particular cue, a professional badge which he wears and is known by, and by nothing else. Thus there is no end of Captain Otter, his Bull, his Bear, and his Horse, which are no joke at first, and do not become so by being repeated twenty times. It is a mere matter of fact, that some landlord of his acquaintance called his drinking cups by these ridiculous names; but why need we be told so more than once, or indeed at all? There is almost a total want of variety, fancy, relief, and of those delightful transitions which abound, for instance, in Shakspeare's tragi-comedy. In Ben Jonson, we find ourselves generally in low company, and we see no hope of getting out of it. He is like a person who fastens upon a disagreeable subject, and cannot be persuaded to leave it. His comedy, in a word, has not what Shakspeare somewhere calls "bless'd conditions." It is cross-grained, mean, and mechanical. It is handicraft wit. Squalid poverty, sheer ignorance, bare-faced impudence, or idiot imbecility, are his dramatic commonplaces—things that provoke pity or disgust, instead of laughter. His portraits are caricatures by dint of their very likeness, being extravagant tautologies of themselves: as his plots are improbable by an excess of consistency: for he goes thorough-stitch with whatever he takes in hand, makes one contrivance answer all purposes, and every obstacle give way to a predetermined theory. For instance, nothing can be more incredible than the mercenary conduct of Corvino, in delivering up his wife to the palsied embraces of Volpone; and yet the poet does not seem in the least to boggle at the incongruity of it: but the more it is in keeping with the absurdity of the

rest of the fable, and the more it advances it to an incredible catastrophe, the more he seems to dwell upon it with complacency and a sort of wilful exaggeration, as if it were a logical discovery or corollary from well-known premises. He would no more be baffled in the working out a plot, than some people will be baffled in an argument. "If to be wise were to be obstinate," our author might have laid signal claim to this title. Old Ben was of a scholastic turn, and had dealt a little in the occult sciences and controversial divinity. He was a man of strong crabbed sense, retentive memory, acute observation, great fidelity of description and keeping in character, [with] a power of working out an idea so as to make it painfully true and oppressive, and with great honesty and manliness of feeling, as well as directness of understanding: but with all this, he wanted, to my thinking, that genial spirit of enjoyment and finer fancy, which constitute the essence of poetry and of wit. The sense of reality exercised a despotic sway over his mind, and equally weighed down and clogged his perception of the beautiful or the ridiculous. He had a keen sense of what was true and false, but not of the difference between the agreeable and disagreeable; or if he had, it was by his understanding rather than his imagination, by rule and method, not by sympathy or intuitive perception of "the gayest, happiest attitude of things." There was nothing spontaneous, no impulse or ease about his genius: it was all forced, uphill work, making a toil of a pleasure. And hence his overweening admiration of his own works, from the effort they had cost him, and the apprehension that they were not proportionably admired by others, who knew nothing of the pangs and throes of his Muse in child-bearing. In his satirical descriptions he seldom stops short of the lowest and most offensive point of meanness; and in his serious poetry he seems to repose with complacency only on the pedantic and far-fetched, the *ultima Thule* of his

knowledge. He has a conscience of letting nothing escape the reader that he knows. *Aliquando sufflaminandus erat*, is as true of him as it was of Shakspeare, but in a quite different sense. He is doggedly bent upon fatiguing you with a favourite idea; whereas, Shakspeare overpowers and distracts attention by the throng and indiscriminate variety of his. His 'Sad Shepherd' is a beautiful fragment. It was a favourite with the late Mr. Horne Tooke: indeed it is no wonder, for there was a sort of sympathy between the two men. Ben was like the modern wit and philosopher, a grammarian and a hard-headed thinker.—There is an amusing account of Ben Jonson's private manners in 'Howel's Letters,' which is not generally known, and which I shall here extract.*

"*To Sir Thomas Hawk, Kt.*

"Sir, *Westminster, 5th April*, 1636.

"I was invited yesternight to a solemn supper by B. J., where you were deeply remembered; there was good company, excellent cheer, choice wines, and jovial welcome: one thing intervened, which almost spoiled the relish of the rest, that B. began to engross all the discourse, to vapour extremely of himself, and, by vilifying others, to magnify his own Muse. T. Ca. (Tom Carew) buzzed me in the ear, that though Ben had barrelled up a great deal of knowledge, yet it seems he had not read the ethics, which, among other precepts of morality, forbid self-commendation, declaring it to be an ill-favoured solecism in good manners. It made me think upon the lady (not very young) who having a good while given her guests neat entertainment, a capon being brought upon the table, instead of a spoon, she took a mouthful of claret, and spouted it into the poop of the hollow bird: such an accident happened in this entertainment: you know—*Proprio laus sordet in ore:* be a man's breath ever so sweet, yet it makes one's praise stink, if he makes his own mouth the conduit-pipe of it. But for my part I am content to dispense with the Roman infirmity of Ben, now that time hath snowed upon his pericranium. You know Ovid and (your) Horace were subject to this humour, the first bursting out into—

Jamque opus exegi, quod nec Jovis ira nec ignis, &c.

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* 'Epistolæ Hoelianæ,' edit. 1754, pp. 323, 324.—Ed.

The other into—

Exegi monumentum ære perennius, &c.

As also Cicero, while he forced himself into this hexameter: *O fortunatam natam, me consule Romam!* There is another reason that excuseth B., which is, that if one be allowed to love the natural issue of his body, why not that of the brain, which is of a spiritual and more noble extraction?"

The concurring testimony of all his contemporaries agrees with his own candid avowal, as to Ben Jonson's personal character. He begins, for instance, an epistle to Drayton in these words—

> "Michael, by some 'tis doubted if I be
> A friend at all; or if at all, to thee—"

Of Shakspeare's comedies I have already given a detailed account, which is before the public, and which I shall not repeat of course: but I shall give a cursory sketch of the principal of Ben Jonson's. The 'Silent Woman' is built upon the supposition of an old citizen disliking noise, who takes to wife Epicene (a supposed young lady) for the reputation of her silence, and with a view to disinherit his nephew, who has laughed at his infirmity; when the ceremony is no sooner over than the bride turns out a very shrew, his house becomes a very Babel of noises, and he offers his nephew his own terms to unloose the matrimonial knot, which is done by proving that Epicene is no woman. There is some humour in the leading character, but too much is made out of it, not in the way of Molière's exaggerations, which, though extravagant, are fantastical and ludicrous, but of serious, plodding, minute prolixity. The first meeting between Morose and Epicene is well managed, and does not "o'erstep the modesty of nature," from the very restraint imposed by the situation of the parties—by the affected taciturnity of the one, and the other's singular dislike of noise. The whole story, from the beginning to the end, is a gratuitous assumption, and the height of improbability. The author, in sustaining

the weight of his plot, seems like a balance-master who supports a number of people, piled one upon another, on his hands, his knees, his shoulders, but with a great effort on his own part, and with a painful effect to the beholders. The scene between Sir Amorous La Foole and Sir John Daw, in which they are frightened by a feigned report of each other's courage, into a submission to all sorts of indignities, which they construe into flattering civilities, is the same device as that in 'Twelfth Night' between Sir Andrew Aguecheek and Viola, carried to a paradoxical and revolting excess. Ben Jonson had no idea of decorum in his dramatic fictions, which Milton says is the principal thing, but went on caricaturing himself and others till he could go no farther in extravagance, and sink no lower in meanness. The titles of his *dramatis personæ*, such as Sir Amorous La Foole, Truewit, Sir John Daw, Sir Politic Wouldbe, &c. &c. which are significant and knowing, show his determination to overdo everything by thus letting you into their characters beforehand, and afterwards proving their pretensions by their names. Thus Peregrine, in 'Volpone,' says, "Your name, Sir? *Politick.* My name is Politick Would-be." To which Peregrine replies, "Oh, that speaks him." How it should, if it was his real name, and not a nick-name given him on purpose by the author, is hard to conceive. This play was Dryden's favourite. It is indeed full of sharp, biting sentences against the women, of which he was fond. The following may serve as a specimen. Truewit says, "Did I not tell thee, Dauphine? Why, all their actions are governed by crude opinion, without reason or cause: they know not why they do anything; but, as they are informed, believe, judge, praise, condemn, love, hate, and in emulation one of another, do all these things alike. Only they have a natural inclination sways 'em generally to the worst, when they are left to themselves." This is a cynical sentence; and we may say of the rest of his opinions, that "even

though we should hold them to be true, yet is it slander to have them so set down." The women in this play indeed justify the author's severity; they are altogether abominable. They have an utter want of principle and decency, and are equally without a sense of pleasure, taste, or elegance. Madame Haughty, Madame Centaur, and Madame Mavis, form the College, as it is here pedantically called. They are a sort of candidates for being upon the town, but cannot find seducers, and a sort of blue-stockings, before the invention of letters. Mistress Epicene, the silent gentlewoman, turns out not to be a woman at all; which is not a very pleasant *denouement* of the plot, and is itself an incident apparently taken from the blundering blindman's-buff conclusion of the 'Merry Wives of Windsor.' What Shakspeare might introduce by an accident, and as a mere passing jest, Ben Jonson would set about building a whole play upon. The directions for making love given by Truewit, the author's favourite, discover great knowledge and shrewdness of observation, mixed with the acuteness of malice, and approach to the best style of comic dialogue. But I must refer to the play itself for them.

The 'Fox,' or 'Volpone' is his best play. It is prolix and improbable, but intense and powerful. It is written *con amore*. It is made up of cheats and dupes, and the author is at home among them. He shows his hatred of the one and contempt for the other, and makes them set one another off to great advantage. There are several striking dramatic contrasts in this play, where the Fox lies *perdue* to watch his prey, where Mosca is the dexterous go-between, outwitting his gulls, his employer, and himself, and where each of the gaping legacy-hunters, the lawyer, the merchant, and the miser, eagerly occupied with the ridiculousness of the other's pretensions, is blind only to the absurdity of his own: but the whole is worked up too mechanically, and our credulity overstretched at last

revolts into scepticism, and our attention overtasked flags into drowsiness. This play seems formed on the model of Plautus, in unity of plot and interest; and old Ben, in emulating his classic model, appears to have done his best. There is the same caustic unsparing severity in it as in his other works. His patience is tried to the utmost. His words drop gall.

> "Hood an ass with reverend purple,
> So you can hide his too ambitious ears,
> And he shall pass for a cathedral doctor."

The scene between Volpone, Mosca, Voltore, Corvino, and Corbaccio, at the outset, will show the dramatic power in the conduct of this play, and will be my justification in what I have said of the literal tenaciousness (to a degree that is repulsive) of the author's imaginary descriptions.

'Every Man in his Humour' is a play well-known to the public. This play acts better than it reads. The pathos in the principal character, Kitely, is "as dry as the remainder biscuit after a voyage." There is, however, a certain good sense, discrimination, or logic of passion in the part, which affords excellent hints for an able actor, and which, if properly pointed, gives it considerable force on the stage. Bobadil is the only actually striking character in the play, and the real hero of the piece. His well-known proposal for the pacification of Europe, by killing some twenty of them, each his man a day, is as good as any other that has been suggested up to the present moment. His extravagant affectation, his bluster-ing and cowardice, are an entertaining medley; and his final defeat and exposure, though exceedingly humorous, are the most affecting part of the story. Brainworm is a particularly dry and abstruse character. We neither know his business nor his motives: his plots are as intricate as they are useless, and as the ignorance of those he imposes upon is wonderful. This is the impression in

reading it. Yet from the bustle and activity of this character on the stage, the changes of dress, the variety of affected tones and gipsy jargon, and the limping affected gestures, it is a very amusing theatrical exhibition. The rest, Master Matthew, Master Stephen, Cob and Cob's wife, were living in the sixteenth century. That is all we know of them. But from the very oddity of their appearance and behaviour, they have a very droll and even picturesque effect when acted. It seems a revival of the dead. We believe in their existence when we see them. As an example of the power of the stage in giving reality and interest to what otherwise would be without it, I might mention the scene in which Brainworm praises Master Stephen's leg. The folly here is insipid from its being seemingly carried to an excess, till we see it; and then we laugh the more at it, the more incredible we thought it before.

'Bartholomew Fair' is chiefly remarkable for the exhibition of odd humours and tumbler's tricks, and is on that account amusing to read once. 'The Alchymist' is the most famous of this author's comedies, though I think it does not deserve its reputation. It contains all that is quaint, dreary, obsolete, and hopeless in this once-famed art, but not the golden dreams and splendid disappointments. We have the mere circumstantials of the sublime science, pots and kettles, aprons and bellows, crucibles and diagrams, all the refuse and rubbish, not the essence, the true *elixir vitæ*. There is, however, one glorious scene between Surly and Sir Epicure Mammon, which is the finest example I know of dramatic sophistry, or of an attempt to prove the existence of a thing by an imposing description of its effects: but compared with this, the rest of the play is a *caput mortuum*. The scene I allude to is the following:—

"*Mammon.* Come on, Sir. Now, you set your foot on shore,
In *Novo Orbe;* here's the rich Peru:

And there within, Sir, are the golden mines,
Great Solomon's Ophir! He was sailing to 't
Three years, but we have reached it in ten months.
This is the day wherein, to all my friends,
I will pronounce the happy word, BE RICH;
This day you shall be Spectatissimi.
You shall no more deal with the hollow dye,
Or the frail card. * * * * * *
You shall start up young viceroys,
And have your punks and punketees, my Surly,
And unto thee, I speak it first, BE RICH.
Where is my Subtle, there? Within, ho!
Face. [*within*] Sir, he'll come to you, by-and-by.
Mam. That is his Firedrake,
His Lungs, his Zephyrus, he that puffs his coals,
Till he firk nature up in her own centre.
You are not faithful, Sir. This night I'll change
All that is metal in my house to gold:
And early in the morning, will I send
To all the plumbers and the pewterers
And buy their tin and lead up; and to Lothbury,
For all the copper.
Surly. What, and turn that too?
Mam. Yes, and I'll purchase Devonshire and Cornwall,
And make them perfect Indies! You admire now?
Surly. No, faith.
Mam. But when you see th' effects of the great medicine,
Of which one part projected on a hundred
Of Mercury, or Venus, or the Moon,
Shall turn it to as many of the Sun;
Nay, to a thousand, so *ad infinitum*,
You will believe me.
Surly. Yes, when I see't, I will—
Mam. Ha! why?
Do you think I fable with you? I assure you,
He that has once the flower of the Sun,
The perfect ruby, which we call Elixir
Not only can do that, but, by its virtue,
Can confer honour, love, respect, long life;
Give safety, valour, yea and victory,
To whom he will. In eight and twenty days,
I'll make an old man of fourscore a child.
Surly. No doubt; he's that already.
Mam. Nay, I mean,

Restore his years, renew him, like an eagle,
To the fifth age; make him get sons and daughters,
Young giants; as our philosophers have done,
The ancient patriarchs, afore the flood,
But taking, once a week, on a knife's point,
The quantity of a grain of mustard of it;
Become stout Marses, and beget young Cupids.
* * * * * *
You are incredulous.
Surly. Faith, I have a humour,
I would not willingly be gull'd. Your stone
Cannot transmute me.
Mam. Pertinax Surly,
Will you believe antiquity? records?
I'll show you a book where Moses and his sister,
And Solomon have written of the art;
Ay, and a treatise penn'd by Adam—
Surly. How!
Mam. Of the philosopher's stone, and in High Dutch.
Surly. Did Adam write, Sir, in High Dutch?
Mam. He did;
Which proves it was the primitive tongue.
* * * * * *
[*Enter Face, as a servant.*
How now!
Do we succeed? Is our day come, and holds it?
Face. The evening will set red upon you, Sir:
You have colour for it, crimson; the red ferment
Has done his office: three hours hence prepare you
To see projection.
Mam. Pertinax, my Surly,
Again I say to thee, aloud, Be rich.
This day thou shalt have ingots; and to-morrow
Give lords the affront * * * Where's thy master?
Face. At his prayers, Sir; he,
Good man, he's doing his devotions
For the success.
Mam. Lungs, I will set a period
To all thy labours; thou shalt be the master
Of my seraglio . . . .
For I do mean
To have a list of wives and concubines
Equal with Solomon: * * * *
I will have all my beds blown up, not stuft:

Down is too hard; and then, mine oval room
Fill'd with such pictures as Tiberius took
From Elephantis, and dull Aretine
But coldly imitated. Then, my glasses
Cut in more subtle angles, to disperse
And multiply the figures, as I walk. * * * My mists
I'll have of perfume, vapoured about the room
To lose ourselves in; and my baths, like pits
To fall into: from whence we will come forth,
And roll us dry in gossamer and roses.
Is it arriv'd at ruby? Where I spy
A wealthy citizen, or a rich lawyer,
Have a sublimed pure wife, unto that fellow
I'll send a thousand pound to be my cuckold.
Face. And I shall carry it?
Mam. No. I'll have no bawds,
But fathers and mothers. They will do it best,
Best of all others. And my flatterers
Shall be the pure[st] and gravest of divines
That I can get for money.
We will be brave, Puffe, now we have the medicine.
My meat shall all come in, in Indian shells,
Dishes of agate set in gold, and studded
With emeralds, sapphires, hyacinths, and rubies.
The tongues of carps, dormice, and camels' heels
Boil'd in the spirit of Sol, and dissolv'd pearl,
Apicius' diet 'gainst the epilepsy;
And I will eat these broths with spoons of amber,
Headed with diamond and carbuncle.
My footboys shall eat pheasants, calver'd salmons,
Knots, godwits, lampreys; I myself will have
The beards of barbels serv'd instead of salads;
Oil'd mushrooms; and the swelling unctuous paps
Of a fat pregnant sow, newly cut off,
Drest with an exquisite and poignant sauce;
For which I'll say unto my cook, *There's gold,*
Go forth, and be a knight.
Face. Sir, I'll go look
A little, how it heightens.
Mam. Do. My shirts
I'll have of taffeta-sarsnet, soft and light
As cobwebs; and for all my other raiment,
It shall be such as might provoke the Persian,
Were he to teach the world riot anew.

My gloves of fishes and birds' skins, perfum'd
With gums of Paradise and eastern air.
Surly. And do you think to have the stone with this?
Mam. No, I do think t' have all this with the stone.
Surly. Why, I have heard, he must be *homo frugi*,
A pious, holy, and religious man,
One free from mortal sin, a very virgin.
Mam. That makes it, Sir, he is so; but I buy it.
My venture brings it me. He, honest wretch,
A notable superstitious, good soul,
Has worn his knees bare and his slippers bald
With prayer and fasting for it, and, Sir, let him
Do it alone, for me, still; here he comes;
Not a profane word afore him: 'tis poison." *

I have only to add a few words on Beaumont and Fletcher. 'Rule a Wife and Have a Wife,' the 'Chances,' and the 'Wild Goose Chase,' the original of the 'Inconstant,' are superior in style and execution to anything of Ben Jonson's. They are, indeed, some of the best comedies on the stage; and one proof that they are so, is, that they still hold possession of it. They show the utmost alacrity of invention in contriving ludicrous distresses, and the utmost spirit in bearing up against, or impatience and irritation under, them. Don John, in the 'Chances,' is the heroic in comedy. Leon, in 'Rule a Wife and Have a Wife,' is a fine exhibition of the born gentleman and natural fool: the Copper Captain is sterling to this hour: his mistress, Estifania, only died the other day with Mrs. Jordan :† and the two grotesque females, in the same play, act better than the Witches in 'Macbeth.'

* Act II. Scene 1.
† This was written in 1818.—Ed.

LECTURE III.

ON COWLEY, BUTLER, SUCKLING, ETHEREGE, ETC.

THE metaphysical poets or wits of the age of James and Charles I., whose style was adopted and carried to a more dazzling and fantastic excess by Cowley in the following reign, after which it declined, and gave place almost entirely to the poetry of observation and reasoning, are thus happily characterised by Dr. Johnson.

"The metaphysical poets were men of learning, and to show their learning was their whole endeavour: but unluckily resolving to show it in rhyme, instead of writing poetry, they only wrote verses, and very often such verses as stood the trial of the finger better than of the ear; for the modulation was so imperfect, that they were only found to be verses by counting the syllables.

"If the father of criticism has rightly denominated poetry τεχνη μιμητική, *an imitative art*, these writers will, without great wrong, lose their right to the name of poets, for they cannot be said to have imitated anything; they neither copied nature nor life; neither painted the forms of matter, nor represented the operations of intellect."

The whole of the account is well worth reading: it was a subject for which Dr. Johnson's powers both of thought and expression were better fitted than any other man's. If he had had the same capacity for following the flights of a truly poetic imagination, or for feeling the finer touches of nature, that he had felicity and force in detecting and exposing the aberrations from the broad and beaten path of propriety and common sense, he would

have amply deserved the reputation he has acquired as a philosophical critic.

The writers here referred to (such as Donne, [Sir John] Davies, Crashaw, and others) not merely mistook learning for poetry—they thought anything was poetry that differed from ordinary prose and the natural impression of things, by being intricate, far-fetched, and improbable. Their style was not so properly learned as metaphysical; that is to say, whenever, by any violence done to their ideas, they could make out an abstract likeness or possible ground of comparison, they forced the image, whether learned or vulgar, into the service of the Muses. Anything would do to "hitch into a rhyme," no matter whether striking or agreeable or not, so that it would puzzle the reader to discover the meaning, and if there was the most remote circumstance, however trifling or vague, for the pretended comparison to hinge upon. They brought ideas together not the most, but the least, like, and of which the collision produced not light, but obscurity—served not to strengthen, but to confound. Their mystical verses read like riddles or an allegory. They neither belong to the class of lively or severe poetry. They have not the force of the one, nor the gaiety of the other; but are an ill-assorted, unprofitable union of the two together, applying to serious subjects that quaint and partial style of allusion which fits only what is light and ludicrous, and building the most laboured conclusions on the most fantastical and slender premises. The object of the poetry of imagination is to raise or adorn one idea by another more striking or more beautiful: the object of these writers was to match any one idea with any other idea, *for better for worse*, as we say, and whether anything was gained by the change of condition or not. The object of the poetry of the passions again is to illustrate any strong feeling, by showing the same feeling as connected with objects or circumstances more palpable and touching; but here the

object was to strain and distort the immediate feeling into some barely possible consequence or recondite analogy, in which it required the utmost stretch of misapplied ingenuity to trace the smallest connection with the original impression. In short, the poetry of this period was strictly the poetry not of ideas, but of *definitions:* it proceeded in mode and figure, by *genus* and specific difference; and was the logic of the schools, or an oblique and forced construction of dry, literal matter-of-fact, decked out in a robe of glittering conceits, and clogged with the halting shackles of verse. The imagination of the writers, instead of being conversant with the face of nature, or the secrets of the heart, was lost in the labyrinths of intellectual abstraction, or entangled in the technical quibbles and impertinent intricacies of language. The complaint so often made, and here repeated, is not of the want of power in these men, but of the waste of it; not of the absence of genius, but the abuse of it. They had (many of them) great talents committed to their trust, richness of thought, and depth of feeling; but they chose to hide them (as much as they possibly could) under a false show of learning and unmeaning subtlety. From the style which they had systematically adopted, they thought nothing done till they had perverted simplicity into affectation, and spoiled nature by art. They seemed to think there was an irreconcilable opposition between genius, as well as grace, and nature; tried to do without, or else constantly to thwart her; left nothing to her outward "impress," or spontaneous impulses, but made a point of twisting and torturing almost every subject they took in hand, till they had fitted it to the mould of their self-opinion and the previous fabrications of their own fancy, like those who pen acrostics in the shape of pyramids, and cut out trees into the shape of peacocks. Their chief aim is to make you wonder at the writer, not to interest you in the subject; and by an incessant craving

after admiration, they have lost what they might have gained with less extravagance and affectation. So Cowper, who was of a quite opposite school, speaks feelingly of the misapplication of Cowley's poetical genius.

> "And though reclaim'd by modern lights
> From an erroneous taste,
> I cannot but lament thy splendid wit
> Entangled in the cobwebs of the schools."

Donne, who was considerably before Cowley, is without his fancy, but was more recondite in his logic, and rigid in his descriptions. He is hence led, particularly in his satires, to tell disagreeable truths in as disagreeable a way as possible, or to convey a pleasing and affecting thought (of which there are many to be found in his other writings) by the harshest means, and with the most painful effort. His Muse suffers continual pangs and throes. His thoughts are delivered by the Cæsarean operation. The sentiments, profound and tender as they often are, are stifled in the expression; and "heaved pantingly forth," are "buried quick again" under the ruins and rubbish of analytical distinctions. It is like poetry waking from a trance, with an eye bent idly on the outward world, and half-forgotten feelings crowding about the heart: with vivid impressions, dim notions, and disjointed words. The following may serve as instances of beautiful or impassioned reflections losing themselves in obscure and difficult applications. He has some lines to a Blossom, which begin thus:

> "Little think'st thou, poor flow'r,
> Whom I have watched six or seven days,
> And seen thy birth, and seen what every hour
> Gave to thy growth, thee to this height to raise,
> And now dost laugh and triumph on this bough,
> Little think'st thou
> That it will freeze anon, and that I shall
> To-morrow find thee fall'n, or not at all."

This simple and delicate description is only introduced as

a foundation for an elaborate metaphysical conceit as a parallel to it, in the next stanza.

> " Little think'st thou (poor heart
> That labour'st yet to nestle thee,
> And think'st by hovering here to get a part
> In a forbidden or forbidding tree,
> And hop'st her stiffness by long siege to bow:)
> Little think'st thou,
> That thou to-morrow, ere the sun doth wake,
> Must with this sun and me a journey take."

This is but a lame and impotent conclusion from so delightful a beginning. He thus notices the circumstance of his wearing his late wife's hair about his arm, in a little poem which is called the 'Funeral':

> " Whoever comes to shroud me, do not harm
> Nor question much
> That subtle wreath of hair about mine arm;
> The mystery, the sign you must not touch."

The scholastic reason he gives quite dissolves the charm of tender and touching grace in the sentiment itself—

> " For 'tis my outward soul,
> Viceroy to that, which unto heaven being gone,
> Will leave this to control,
> And keep these limbs, her provinces, from dissolution."

Again, the following lines, the title of which is 'Love's Deity,' are highly characteristic of this author's manner, in which the thoughts are inlaid in a costly but imperfect mosaic-work.

> " *I long to talk with some old lover's ghost,*
> *Who died before the God of Love was born:*
> I cannot think that he, who then lov'd most,
> Sunk so low, as to love one which did scorn.
> But since this God produc'd a destiny,
> And that vice-nature, custom, lets it be;
> I must love her that loves not me."

The stanza in the 'Epithalamion on [Frederic of Bohemia] Count Palatine of the Rhine,' has been often quoted against

him, and is an almost irresistible illustration of the extravagances to which this kind of writing, which turns upon a pivot of words and possible allusions, is liable. Speaking of the bride and bridegroom, he says, by way of serious compliment—

> "Here lies a she-Sun, and a he-Moon there,
> She gives the best light to his sphere;
> Or each is both and all, and so
> They unto one another nothing owe."

His love-verses and epistles to his friends give the most favourable idea of Donne. His satires are too clerical.* He shows, if I may so speak, too much disgust, and, at the same time, too much contempt for vice. His dogmatical invectives hardly redeem the nauseousness of his descriptions, and compromise the imagination of his readers more than they assist their reason. The satirist does not write with the same authority as the divine, and should use his poetical privileges more sparingly. "To the pure all things are pure," is a maxim which a man like Dr. Donne may be justified in applying to himself; but he might have recollected that it could not be construed to extend to the generality of his readers *without benefit of clergy.*

Bishop Hall's 'Satires' are coarse railing in verse, and hardly that. Pope has, however, contrived to avail himself of them in some of his imitations.

Sir John Davies is the author of a poem on the 'Soul,' and of one on 'Dancing.'† In both he shows great ingenuity, and sometimes terseness and vigour. In the last of these two poems his fancy *pirouettes* in a very lively and agreeable manner, but something too much in the style of a French opera-dancer, with sharp angular turns,

* Yet these satires were among his most youthful performances. A MS. copy of them in the Harleian collection is dated 1593.—Ed.

† Also of epigrams, a translation of many of the Psalms, and of several miscellaneous pieces, all included in Mr. Grosart's recent edition. He has also left some prose writings behind him.—Ed.

and repeated deviations from the faultless line of simplicity and nature.

Crashaw was a writer of the same ambitious stamp, whose imagination was rendered still more inflammable by the fervours of fanaticism, and who having been converted from Protestantism to Popery (a weakness to which the "seething brains" of the poets of this period were prone) by some visionary appearance of the Virgin Mary, poured out his devout raptures and zealous enthusiasm in a torrent of poetical hyperboles. The celebrated Latin epigram on the miracle of our Saviour, "The water blushed into wine," is in his usual *hectic* manner. His translation of the contest between the Musician and the Nightingale is the best specimen of his powers.

Davenant's 'Gondibert' is a tissue of stanzas, all aiming to be wise and witty, each containing something in itself, and the whole together amounting to nothing. The thoughts separately require so much attention to understand them, and arise so little out of the narrative, that they with difficulty sink into the mind, and have no common feeling of interest to recall or link them together afterwards. The general style may be judged of by these two memorable lines in the description of the skeleton chamber.

> "Yet on that wall hangs he too, who so thought,
> And she dried by him whom that he obeyed."

Mr. Hobbes, in a prefatory discourse, has thrown away a good deal of powerful logic and criticism in recommendation of the plan of his friend's poem. Davenant, who was poet-laureate to Charles II., wrote several masques and plays which were well received in his time, but have not come down with equal applause to us.

Marvel (on whom I have already bestowed such praise as I could, for elegance and tenderness in his descriptive poems) in his satires and witty pieces was addicted to the affected and involved style here reprobated, as in his

'Flecknoe' (the origin of Dryden's 'Macflecknoe') and in his satire on the Dutch. As an instance of this forced, far-fetched method of treating his subject, he says, in ridicule of the Hollanders, that when their dykes overflowed, the fish used to come to table with them,

"And sat not as a meat, but as a guest."

There is a poem of Marvel's on the death of King Charles I. which I have not seen, but which I have heard praised by one whose praise is never high but of the highest things,* for the beauty and pathos, as well as generous frankness of the sentiments, coming, as they did, from a determined and incorruptible political foe.

Shadwell was a successful and voluminous dramatic writer of much the same period. His 'Libertine' (taken from the celebrated Spanish story) is full of spirit; but it is the spirit of licentiousness and impiety. At no time do there appear to have been such extreme speculations afloat on the subject of religion and morality, as there were shortly after the Reformation, and afterwards under the Stuarts, the differences being widened by political irritation; and the Puritans often over-acting one extreme out of grimace and hypocrisy, as the king's party did the other out of *bravado*.

Carew is excluded from his pretensions to the laureate-ship in Suckling's 'Sessions of the Poets,' on account of his slowness. His verses are delicate and pleasing, with a certain feebleness, but with very little tincture of the affectation of this period. His masque (called *Cœlum Britannicum*) in celebration of a marriage at court, has not much wit nor fancy, but the accompanying prose directions and commentary on the mythological story, are written with wonderful facility and elegance, in a style of familiar dramatic dialogue approaching nearer the writers of Queen Anne's reign than those of Queen Elizabeth's.

* Probably, Charles Lamb is here meant.—Ed.

Milton's name is included by Dr. Johnson in the list of metaphysical poets on no better authority than his lines on 'Hobson the Cambridge Carrier,' which he acknowledges were the only ones Milton wrote on this model. Indeed, he is the great contrast to that style of poetry, being remarkable for breadth and massiness, or what Dr. Johnson calls "aggregation of ideas," beyond almost any other poet. He has in this respect been compared to Michael Angelo, but not with much reason: his verses are

> ——— "inimitable on earth
> By model, or by shading pencil drawn."

Suckling is also ranked, without sufficient warrant, among the metaphysical poets. Sir John was of "the court, courtly;" and his style almost entirely free from the charge of pedantry and affectation. There are a few blemishes of this kind in his works, but they are but few. His compositions are almost all of them short and lively effusions of wit and gallantry, written in a familiar but spirited style, without much design or effort. His shrewd and taunting address to a desponding lover will sufficiently vouch for the truth of this account of the general cast of his best pieces.

> "Why so pale and wan, fond lover?
> Pr'ythee why so pale?
> Will, when looking well can't move her,
> Looking ill prevail?
> Pr'ythee why so pale?
>
> "Why so dull and mute, young sinner?
> Pr'ythee why so mute?
> Will, when speaking well can't win her,
> Saying nothing do't?
> Pr'ythee why so mute?
>
> "Quit, quit for shame, this will not move,
> This cannot take her;
> If of herself she will not love,
> Nothing can make her;
> The Devil take her."

The two short poems against 'Fruition,' that beginning, "There never yet was woman made, nor shall, but to be curst,"—the song, "I pr'ythee, spare me, gentle boy, press me no more for that slight toy, that foolish trifle of a heart,"—another, "'Tis now, since I sat down before, that foolish fort, a heart,"—*Lutea Alanson*—the set of similes, "Hast thou seen the down in the air, when wanton winds have tost it,"—and his 'Dream,' which is of a more tender and romantic cast, are all exquisite in their way. They are the origin of the style of Prior and Gay in their short fugitive verses, and of the songs in the Beggar's Opera. His Ballad on a Wedding is his masterpiece, and is indeed unrivalled in that class of composition, for the voluptuous delicacy of the sentiments, and the luxuriant richness of the images. I wish I could repeat the whole, but that, from the change of manners, is impossible. The description of the bride is (half of it) as follows: the story is supposed to be told by one countryman to another. *

"Her finger was so small, the ring
Would not stay on, which they did bring;
It was too wide a peck:
And to say truth (for out it must)
It look'd like the great collar (just)
About our young colt's neck.

"Her feet beneath her petticoat,
Like little mice, stole in and out,
As if they fear'd the light:
But oh! she dances such a way!
No sun upon an Easter-day
Is half so fine a sight.†
* * * * *

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* Probably an error. See a note in Lovelace's 'Poems,' ed. Hazlitt, xxxii., and 'Notes and Queries,' fourth series, ii., 579.—Ed.

† An allusion, of course, to the myth, that the sun dances on Easter-day. See 'Popular Antiquities of Great Britain,' 1869, i. 91-2.—Ed.

"Her cheeks so rare a white was on,
No daisy makes comparison,
(Who sees them is undone,
For streaks of red were mingled there,
Such as are on a Cath'rine pear,
(The side that's next the sun.)

"Her lips were red; and one was thin,
Compar'd to that was next her chin
(Some bee had stung it newly;)
But (Dick) her eyes so guard her face,
I durst no more upon them gaze,
Than on the sun in July.

"Her mouth so small, when she does speak,
Thoud'st swear her teeth her words did break,
That they might passage get;
But she so handled still the matter,
They came as good as ours, or better,
And are not spent a whit."

There is to me in the whole of this delightful performance a freshness and purity like the first breath of morning. Its sportive irony never trespasses on modesty, though it sometimes (laughing) threatens to do so! Suckling's 'Letters' are full of habitual gaiety and good sense. His 'Discourse on Reason in Religion' is well enough meant. Though he excelled in the conversational style of poetry, writing verse with the freedom and readiness, vivacity and unconcern, with which he would have talked on the most familiar and sprightly topics, his peculiar powers deserted him in attempting dramatic dialogue. His comedy of the *Goblins* is equally defective in plot, wit, and nature; it is a wretched list of *exits* and *entrances*, and the whole business of the scene is taken up in the unaccountable seizure, and equally unaccountable escapes, of a number of persons from a band of robbers in the shape of goblins, who turn out to be noblemen and gentlemen in disguise.*

* While writing this drama, the author appears to have had in view a passage in the 'Merry Wives of Windsor,' and one also in the 'Tempest.'—Ed.

Suckling was not a Grub Street author; or it might be said, that this play is like what he might have written after dreaming all night of duns and a sponging-house. His tragedies are no better: their titles are the most interesting part of them, 'Aglaura,' 'Brennoralt,' and the 'Sad One.'

Cowley had more brilliancy of fancy and ingenuity of thought than Donne, with less pathos and sentiment. His mode of illustrating his ideas differs also from Donne's in this: that whereas Donne is contented to analyse an image into its component elements, and resolve it into its most abstracted species, Cowley first does this indeed, but does not stop till he has fixed upon some other prominent example of the same general class of ideas, and forced them into a metaphorical union, by the medium of the generic definition. Thus he says—

> "The Phœnix Pindar is a vast species alone."

He means to say that he stands by himself: he is then "a vast species alone:" then by applying to this generality the *principium individuationis*, he becomes a Phœnix, because the Phœnix is the only example of a species contained in an individual. Yet this is only a literal or metaphysical coincidence: and literally and metaphysically speaking, Pindar was not a species by himself, but only seemed so by pre-eminence or excellence; that is, from qualities of mind appealing to and absorbing the imagination, and which, therefore, ought to be represented in poetical language, by some other obvious and palpable image exhibiting the same kind or degree of excellence in other things, as when Gray compares him to the Theban eagle,

> "Sailing with supreme dominion
> Through the azure deep of air."

Again, he talks in the 'Motto, or Invocation to his Muse, of "marching the Muse's Hannibal" into undiscovered

regions. That is, he thinks, first of being a leader in poetry, and then he immediately, by virtue of this abstraction, becomes a Hannibal; though no two things can really be more unlike in all the associations belonging to them, than a leader of armies and a leader of the tuneful Nine. In like manner, he compares Bacon to Moses; for in *his* verses extremes are sure to meet. The 'Hymn to Light,' which forms a perfect contrast to Milton's 'Invocation to Light,' in the commencement of the third book of 'Paradise Lost,' begins in the following manner:—

"First-born of Chaos, who so fair didst come
From the old negro's darksome womb!
Which, when it saw the lovely child,
The melancholy mass put on kind looks, and smil'd."
* * * * * * * * *

And soon after—

"'Tis, I believe, this archery to show
That so much cost in colours thou,
And skill in painting, dost bestow,
Upon thy ancient arms, the gaudy heav'nly bow.

"Swift as light thoughts their empty career run,
Thy race is finish'd when begun;
Let a post-angel start with thee,
And thou the goal of earth shalt reach as soon as he."

The conceits here are neither wit nor poetry; but a burlesque upon both, made up of a singular metaphorical jargon, verbal generalities, and physical analogies. Thus his calling Chaos, or Darkness, "the old negro," would do for abuse or jest, but is too remote and degrading for serious poetry, and yet it is meant for such. The "old negro" is at best a nickname, and the smile on its face loses its beauty in such company. The making out the rainbow to be a species of heraldic painting, and converting an angel into a post-boy, show the same rage for comparison; but such comparisons are as odious as they are

unjust. Dr. Johnson has multiplied instances of the same false style, in its various divisions and subdivisions.* Of Cowley's serious poems, the 'Complaint' is the one I like the best; and some of his translations in the Essays, as those on 'Liberty and Retirement,' are exceedingly good. The 'Odes to Vandyke,' to the 'Royal Society,' to 'Hobbes,' and to the later 'Brutus,' beginning "Excellent Brutus," are all full of ingenious and high thoughts, impaired by a load of ornament and quaint disguises. The 'Chronicle, or list of his Mistresses,' is the best of his original lighter pieces: but the best of his poems are the translations from Anacreon, which remain, and are likely to remain unrivalled. The spirit of wine and joy circulates in them; and though they are lengthened out beyond the originals, it is by fresh impulses of an eager and inexhaustible feeling of delight. Here are some of them:—

DRINKING.

"The thirsty earth soaks up the rain,
And drinks, and gapes for drink again.
The plants suck in the earth, and are
With constant drinking fresh and fair.
The sea itself, which one would think
Should have but little need of drink,
Drinks twice ten thousand rivers up,
So fill'd that they o'erflow the cup.
The busy sun (and one would guess
By 's drunken fiery face no less)
Drinks up the sea, and, when he 's done,
The moon and stars drink up the sun.
They drink and dance by their own light,
They drink and revel all the night.
Nothing in nature 's sober found,
But an eternal health goes round.
Fill up the bowl then, fill it high,
Fill all the glasses there; for why
Should every creature drink but I;
Why, man of morals, tell me why?"

* See his 'Lives of the British Poets,' Vol. I.

This is a classical intoxication; and the poet's imagination, giddy with fancied joys, communicates its spirit and its motion to inanimate things, and makes all nature reel round with it. It is not easy to decide between these choice pieces, which may be reckoned among the *delights of human kind;* but that to the Grasshopper is one of the happiest as well as most serious:—

"Happy insect, what can be
In happiness compar'd to thee?
Fed with nourishment divine,
The dewy morning's gentle wine!
Nature waits upon thee still,
And thy verdant cup does fill;
'Tis fill'd wherever thou dost tread,
Nature's self thy Ganymede.
Thou dost drink, and dance, and sing;
Happier than the happiest king!
All the fields which thou dost see,
All the plants, belong to thee;
All that summer-hours produce,
Fertile made with early juice.
Man for thee does sow and plough,
Farmer he, and landlord thou!
Thou dost innocently joy;
Nor does thy luxury destroy;
The shepherd gladly heareth thee,
More harmonious than he.
Thee country hinds with gladness hear,
Prophet of the ripen'd year;
Thee Phœbus loves, and does inspire;
Phœbus is himself thy sire.
To thee, of all things upon earth,
Life is no longer than thy mirth.
Happy insect, happy thou!
Dost neither age nor winter know;
But, when thou'st drunk, and danc'd, and sung
Thy fill, the flowery leaves among,
(Voluptuous and wise withal,
Epicurean animal!)
Sated with thy summer feast,
Thou retir'st to endless rest."

Cowley's Essays* are among the most agreeable prose-compositions in our language, being equally recommended by sense, wit, learning, and interesting personal history, and written in a style quite free from the faults of his poetry. It is a pity that he did not cultivate his talent for prose more, and write less in verse, for he was clearly a man of more reflection than imagination. The Essays on 'Agriculture,' on 'Liberty,' on 'Solitude,' and on 'Greatness,' are all of them delightful. From the last I may give his account of Senecio as an addition to the instances of the ludicrous, which I have attempted to enumerate in the introductory Lecture; whose ridiculous affectation of grandeur Seneca the elder (he tells us) describes to this effect: "Senecio was a man of a turbid and confused wit, who could not endure to speak any but mighty words and sentences, till this humour grew at last into so notorious a habit, or rather disease, as became the sport of the whole town: he would have no servants, but huge, massy fellows; no plate or household-stuff, but thrice as big as the fashion: you may believe me, for I speak it without raillery, his extravagancy came at last into such a madness, that he would not put on a pair of shoes, each of which was not big enough for both his feet: he would eat nothing but what was great, nor touch any fruit but horse-plums and pound-pears: he kept a mistress that was a very giantess, and made her walk too always in chiopins, till, at last, he got the surname of Senecio Grandio." This was certainly the most absurd person we read of in antiquity. Cowley's character of Oliver Cromwell, which is intended as a satire (though it certainly produces a very different impression on the mind), may vie for truth of outline and force of colouring with the masterpieces of the Greek and Latin historians. It may serve as a contrast to the last extract. "What can be more extraordinary than that a

* A separate edition of these was published by Mr. Pickering in 1826, 8vo.—Ed.

person of mean birth, no fortune, no eminent qualities of body, which have sometimes, or of mind, which have often, raised men to the highest dignities, should have the courage to attempt, and the happiness to succeed in, so improbable a design, as the destruction of one of the most ancient and most solidly-founded monarchies upon the earth? That he should have the power or boldness to put his prince and master to an open and infamous death; to banish that numerous and strongly-allied family; to do all this under the name and wages of a Parliament; to trample upon them too as he pleased, and spurn them out of doors when he grew weary of them; to raise up a new and unheard-of monster out of their ashes; to stifle that in the very infancy, and set up himself above all things that ever were called sovereign in England; to oppress all his enemies by arms, and all his friends afterwards by artifice; to serve all parties patiently for a while, and to command them victoriously at last; to over-run each corner of the three nations, and overcome with equal facility both the riches of the south and the poverty of the north; to be feared and courted by all foreign princes, and adopted a brother to the gods of the earth; to call together Parliaments with a word of his pen, and scatter them again with the breath of his mouth; to be humbly and daily petitioned that he would please to be hired, at the rate of two millions a year, to be the master of those who had hired him before to be their servant; to have the estates and lives of three kingdoms as much at his disposal as was the little inheritance of his father, and to be as noble and liberal in the spending of them; and lastly (for there is no end of all the particulars of his glory), to bequeath all this with one word to his posterity; to die with peace at home, and triumph abroad; to be buried among kings, and with more than regal solemnity; and to leave a name behind him, not to be extinguished, but with the whole world; which

as it is now too little for his praises, so might have been too for his conquests, if the short line of his human life could have been stretched out to the extent of his immortal designs!"

Cowley has left one comedy, called [the] 'Cutter of Coleman Street,'* which met with an unfavourable reception at the time, and is now (not undeservedly) forgotten. It contains, however, one good scene, which is rich both in fancy and humour, that between the puritanical bride, Tabitha, and her ranting royalist husband. It is said that this play was originally composed, and afterwards revived, as a satire upon the Presbyterian party; yet it was resented by the court party as a satire upon itself. A man must, indeed, be sufficiently blind with party prejudice, to have considered this as a compliment to his own side of the question. "Call you this backing of your friends?" The cavaliers are in this piece represented as reduced to the lowest shifts in point of fortune, and sunk still lower in point of principle.

The greatest single production of wit of this period, I might say of this country, is Butler's 'Hudibras.' It contains specimens of every variety of drollery and satire, and those specimens crowded together into almost every page. The proof of this is, that nearly one-half of his lines are got by heart, and quoted for mottoes. In giving instances of different sorts of wit, or trying to recollect good things of this kind, they are the first which stand ready in the memory; and they are those which furnish the best tests and most striking illustrations of what we want. Dr. Campbell, in his 'Philosophy of Rhetoric,' when treating of the subject of wit, which he has done very neatly and sensibly, has constant recourse to two authors, Pope and Butler, the one for ornament, the other more for

* This was originally produced and printed in Cromwell's time (1650, under the title of 'The Guardian;' on its revival at the Restoration, the name was changed, and the piece itself altered.—Ed.

use. Butler is equally in the hands of the learned and the vulgar; for the sense is generally as solid as the images are amusing and grotesque. Whigs and Tories join in his praise. He could not, in spite of himself,

> ——"narrow his mind,
> And to party give up what was meant for mankind."

Though his subject was local and temporary, his fame was not circumscribed within his own age. He was admired by Charles II. and has been rewarded by posterity. It is the poet's fate! It is not, perhaps, to be wondered at, that arbitrary and worthless monarchs like Charles II. should neglect those who pay court to them. The idol (if it had sense) would despise its worshippers. Indeed, Butler hardly merited anything on the score of loyalty to the house of Stuart. True wit is not a parasite plant. The strokes which it aims at folly and knavery on one side of a question, tell equally home on the other. Dr. Zachary Grey, who added notes to the poem,* and abused the leaders of Cromwell's party by name, would be more likely to have gained a pension for his services than Butler, who was above such petty work. A poem like 'Hudibras' could not be *made to order of a court.* Charles might very well have reproached the author with wanting to show his own wit and sense rather than to favour a tottering cause; and he has even been suspected, in parts of his poem, of glancing at majesty itself. He in general ridicules not persons, but things, not a party, but their principles, which may belong, as time and occasion serve, to one set of solemn pretenders or another. This he has done most effectually, in every possible way, and from every possible source, learned or unlearned. He has exhausted the moods and figures of satire and sophistry.†

* In 1744, 2 vols., 8vo. But a good edition of Butler is still a desideratum.—Ed.

† "And have not two saints power to use
A greater privilege than three Jews?"
* * * * * * ["Hor

It would be possible to deduce the different forms of syllogism in Aristotle, from the different violations or mock imitations of them in Butler. He fulfils every one of Barrow's conditions of wit, which I have enumerated in the first Lecture. He makes you laugh or smile by comparing the high to the low,* or by pretending to raise the low to the lofty,† he succeeds equally in the familiarity of his illustrations,‡ or their incredible extravagance,§ by comparing things that are alike or not alike. He surprises equally by his coincidences or contradictions, by spinning out a long-winded flimsy excuse, or by turning short upon

---

" Her voice, the music of the spheres,
So loud it deafens mortals' ears,
As wise philosophers have thought,
And that's the cause we hear it not."

* " No Indian prince has to his palace
More followers than a thief to the gallows."

† " And in his nose, like Indian king,
He (Bruin) wore for ornament a ring."

‡ " Whose noise whets valour sharp, like beer
By thunder turned to vinegar."

§ " Replete with strange hermetic powder,
That wounds nine miles point-blank would solder.
* * * * * * * *
" His tawny beard was th' equal grace
Both of his wisdom and his face;
In cut and die so like a tile,
A sudden view it would beguile:
The upper part thereof was whey,
The nether orange mixed with grey.
This hairy meteor did denounce
The fall of sceptres and of crowns;
With grisly type did represent
Declining age of government;
And tell with hieroglyphic spade
Its own grave and the state's were made.
* * * * * *
" This sword a dagger had his page,
That was but little for his age;
And therefore waited on him so,
As dwarfs upon knight-errants do.

you with the point-blank truth. His rhymes are as witty as his reasons, equally remote from what common custom would suggest;* and he startles you sometimes by an empty sound like a blow upon a drum-head,† by a pun upon one word,‡ and by splitting another in two at the end of a verse, with the same alertness and power over the odd and unaccountable in the combinations of sounds as of images.§

There are as many shrewd aphorisms in his works, clenched by as many quaint and individual allusions, as perhaps in any author whatever. He makes none but palpable hits, that may be said to give one's understanding a rap on the knuckles.‖ He is, indeed, sometimes too prolific, and spins his antithetical sentences out, one after another, till the reader, not the author, is wearied. He is, however, very seldom guilty of repetitions or wordy paraphrases of himself; but he sometimes comes rather too near it; and interrupts the thread of his argument (for narrative he has none) by a tissue of epigrams, and the tagging of points and conundrums without end. The fault, or original sin of his genius, is, that from too much leaven it ferments and runs over; and there is, unfortunately, nothing in his subject to restrain and keep it

* "And straight another with his flambeau,
Gave Ralpho o'er the eyes a damn'd blow.
* * * * * * *
"That deals in destiny's dark counsels,
And sage opinions of the moon sells."

† "The mighty Tottipottimoy
Sent to our elders an envoy."

‡ "For Hebrew *roots*, although they're found
To flourish most in barren ground."

§ "Those wholesale critics that in coffee-
Houses cry down all philosophy."

‖ "This we among ourselves may speak,
But to the wicked or the weak
We must be cautious to declare
Perfection-truths, such as these are."

within compass. He has no story good for anything; and his characters are good for very little. They are too low and mechanical, or too much one thing, personifications, as it were, of nicknames, and bugbears of popular prejudice and vulgar cant, unredeemed by any virtue, or difference or variety of disposition. There is no relaxation or shifting of the parts; and the impression in some degree fails of its effect, and becomes questionable from its being always the same. The satire looks, at length, almost like special-pleading: it has nothing to confirm it in the apparent good humour or impartiality of the writer. It is something revolting to see an author persecute his characters, the cherished offspring of his brain, in this manner, without mercy. 'Hudibras' and 'Ralpho' have immortalized Butler; and what has he done for them in return, but set them up to be "pilloried on infamy's high and lasting stage?" This is ungrateful!

The rest of the characters have, in general, little more than their names and professions to distinguish them. We scarcely know one from another, Cerdon, or Orsin, or Crowdero, and are often obliged to turn back, to connect their several adventures together. In fact Butler drives only at a set of obnoxious opinions, and runs into general declamations. His poem in its essence is a satire, or didactic poem. It is not virtually dramatic, or narrative. It is composed of digressions by the author. He instantly breaks off in the middle of a story, or incident, to comment upon or turn it into ridicule. He does not give characters but topics, which would do just as well in his own mouth without agents, or machinery of any kind. The long digression in Part III. in which no mention is made of the hero, is just as good and as much an integrant part of the poem as the rest. The conclusion is lame and impotent, but that is saying nothing; the beginning and middle are equally so as to historical merit. There is no keeping in his characters, as in 'Don Quixote;' nor any

enjoyment of the ludicrousness of their situations, as in Hogarth. Indeed, it requires a considerable degree of sympathy to enter into and describe to the life even the ludicrous eccentricities of others, and there is no appearance of sympathy or liking to his subject in Butler. His humour is to his wit, "as one grain of wheat in a bushel of chaff: you shall search all day, and when you find it, it is not worth the trouble." Yet there are exceptions. The most decisive is, I think, the description of the battle between Bruin and his foes, Part I. Canto iii., and again of the triumphal procession in Part II. Canto ii., of which the principal features are copied in Hogarth's election print, the Chairing of the Successful Candidate. The account of Sidrophel and Whackum is another instance, and there are some few others, but rarely sprinkled up and down.*

* The following are nearly all I can remember.—

"Thus stopp'd their fury and the basting
Which towards Hudibras was hasting."

It is said of the bear, in the fight with the dogs—

"And setting his right foot before,
He raised himself to show how tall
His person was above them all.
* * * * * * * *

"At this the knight grew high in chafe,
And staring furiously on Ralph,
He trembled and look'd pale with ire,
Like ashes first, then red as fire.
* * * * * * * *

"The knight himself did after ride,
Leading Crowdero by his side,
And tow'd him if he lagged behind,
Like boat against the tide and wind.
* * * * * * * *

"And rais'd upon his desperate foot,
On stirrup-side he gazed about.
* * * * * * * *

"And Hudibras, who used to ponder
On such sights with judicious wonder."
* * * * * * * *

[The

The widow, the termagant heroine of the poem, is still more disagreeable than her lover; and her sarcastic account of the passion of love, as consisting entirely in an attachment to land and houses, goods and chattels, which is enforced with all the rhetoric the author is master of, and hunted down through endless similes, is evidently false. The vulgarity and meanness of sentiment which Butler complains of in the Presbyterians, seems at last from long familiarity and close contemplation to have tainted his own mind. Their worst vices appear to have taken root in his imagination. Nothing but what was selfish and grovelling sunk into his memory, in the depression of a menial situation under his supposed hero. He has, indeed, carried his private grudge too far into his general speculations. He even makes out the rebels to be cowards and well-beaten, which does not accord with the history of the times. In an excess of zeal for church and state, he is too much disposed to treat religion as a cheat, and liberty as a farce. It was the cant of that day (from which he is not free) to cry down sanctity and sobriety as marks of disaffection, as it is the cant of this, to hold them up as proofs of loyalty and staunch monarchical prin-

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The beginning of the account of the procession in Part II. is as follows:—

"Both thought it was the wisest course
To waive the fight and mount to horse,
And to secure by swift retreating,
Themselves from danger of worse beating:
Yet neither of them would disparage
By uttering of his mind his courage.
Which made 'em stoutly keep their ground,
With horror and disdain wind-bound.
And now the cause of all their fear
By slow degrees approach'd so near,
They might distinguish different noise
Of horns and pans, and dogs and boys,
And kettle-drums, whose sullen dub
Sounds like the hooping of a tub."

ciples.* Religion and morality are, in either case, equally made subservient to the spirit of party, and a stalking-horse to the love of power. Finally, there is a want of pathos and humour, but no want of interest in 'Hudibras.' It is difficult to lay it down. One thought is inserted into another; the links in the chain of reasoning are so closely riveted, that the attention seldom flags, but is kept alive (without any other assistance) by the mere force of writing. There are occasional indications of poetical fancy, and an eye for natural beauty; but these are kept under or soon discarded, judiciously enough, but it should seem, not for lack of power, for they are certainly as masterly as they are rare. Such are the burlesque description of the stocks, or allegorical prison, in which first Crowdero, and then Hudibras, is confined: the passage beginning—

> "As when an owl that's in a barn,
> Sees a mouse creeping in the corn,
> Sits still and shuts his round blue eyes,
> As if he slept," &c.

And the description of the moon going down in the early morning, which is as pure, original, and picturesque as possible:—

> "The queen of night, whose large command
> Rules all the sea and half the land,
> And over moist and crazy brains
> In high spring-tides at midnight reigns,
> Was now declining to the west,
> To go to bed and take her rest."

Butler is sometimes scholastic, but he makes his learning tell to good account; and for the purposes of burlesque, nothing can be better fitted than the scholastic style.

Butler's 'Remains' are nearly as good and full of sterling

* This was written in 1818, yet it is scarcely an obsolete observation (1869).—Ed.

genius as his principal poem. Take the following ridicule of the plan of the Greek tragedies as an instance.*

—"Reduce all tragedy, by rules of art,
Back to its ancient theatre, a cart,
And make them henceforth keep the beaten roads
Of reverend choruses and episodes;
Reform and regulate a puppet-play,
According to the true and ancient way;
That not an actor shall presume to squeak,
Unless he have a license for't in Greek:
Nor devil in the puppet-play be allowed
To roar and spit fire, but to fright the crowd,
Unless some god or demon chance to have piques
Against an ancient family of Greeks;
That other men may tremble and take warning.
How such a fatal progeny they're born in;
For none but such for tragedy are fitted,
That have been ruined only to be pitied:
And only those held proper to deter,
Who have th' ill luck against their wills to err;
Whence only such as are of middling sizes,
Betwixt morality and venial vices,
Are qualified to be destroyed by fate,
For other mortals to take warning at."

Upon Critics.

His ridicule of Milton's Latin style is equally severe, but not so well founded.

I have only to add a few words respecting the dramatic writers about this time, before we arrive at the golden period of our comedy. Those of Etherege † are good for nothing, except 'The Man of Mode, or Sir Fopling Flutter,' which is, I think, a more exquisite and airy picture of the manners of that age than any other extant. Sir Fopling himself is an inimitable coxcomb, but pleasant withal. He is a suit of clothes personified. Dorimant (supposed to be Lord Rochester) is the genius of grace, gallantry, and gaiety. The women in this courtly

* Davenant, in his 'First Day's Entertainment at Rutland House,' 1657, had seemed to approve of the ancient dramatic models.—Ed.

† 'Love in a Tub,' and 'She Would if She Could.'

play have very much the look and air (but something more demure and significant) of Sir Peter Lely's beauties. Harriet, the mistress of Dorimant, who "tames his wild heart to her loving hand," is the flower of the piece. Her natural, untutored grace and spirit, her meeting with Dorimant in the park, bowing and mimicking him, and the luxuriant description which is given of her fine person, altogether form one of the *chef-d'œuvres* of dramatic painting. I should think this comedy would bear reviving; and if Mr. Liston were to play Sir Fopling, the part would shine out with double lustre, "like the morn risen on mid-noon."* Dryden's comedies have all the point that there is in ribaldry, and all the humour that there is in extravagance. I am sorry I can say nothing better of them. He was not at home in this kind of writing, of which he was himself conscious. His play was *horse-play*. His wit (what there is of it) is ingenious and scholar-like, rather than natural and dramatic. Thus Burr, in the 'Wild Gallant,' says to Failer, "She shall sooner cut an atom than part us."—His plots are pure *voluntaries* in absurdity, that bend and shift to his purpose without any previous notice or reason, and are governed by final causes. 'Sir Martin Mar-all,' which was taken from the Duchess of Newcastle, is the best of his plays, and the origin of the 'Busy Body.' Otway's comedies do no sort of credit to him; on the contrary, they are as desperate as his fortunes. The Duke of Buckingham's famous 'Rehearsal,' which has made, and deservedly, so much noise in the world, is in a great measure taken from Beaumont and Fletcher's 'Knight of the Burning Pestle,' which was written in ridicule of the London apprentices, in the reign of Elizabeth, who had a great hand in the critical decisions of that age.† There were other dramatic

* This was written in 1818.—Ed.

† This drama was supposed by the late Mr. Dyce to have been written about 1610.—Ed.

writers of this period, noble and plebeian. I shall only mention one other piece, the 'Committee,' I believe by Sir Robert Howard,* which has of late been cut down into the farce called 'Honest Thieves,' and which I remember reading with a great deal of pleasure many years ago.

One cause of the difference between the immediate reception and lasting success of dramatic works at this period may be, that after the court took the playhouses under its particular protection, everything became very much an affair of private patronage. If an author could get a learned lord or a countess-dowager to bespeak a box at his play, and applaud the doubtful passages, he considered his business as done. On the other hand, there was a reciprocity between men of letters and their patrons; critics were "mitigated into courtiers, and submitted," as Mr. Burke has it, "to the soft collar of social esteem," in pronouncing sentence on the works of lords and ladies. How ridiculous this seems now! What a hubbub it would create, if it were known that a particular person of fashion and title had taken a front box in order to decide on the fate of a first play! How the newspaper critics would laugh in their sleeves! How the public would sneer! But at this time there was no public. I will not say, therefore, that these times are better than those; but they are better, I think, in this respect. An author now-a-days no longer hangs dangling on the frown of a lord, or the smile of a lady of quality (the one governed perhaps by his valet, and the other by her waiting-maid), but throws himself boldly, making a lover's leap of it, into the broad lap of public opinion, on which he falls like a feather bed; and which, like the great bed of Ware, is wide enough to hold us all very comfortably!

* Pepys saw it performed June 12th, 1663: it was printed in folio, 1665.—Ed.

LECTURE IV.

ON WYCHERLEY, CONGREVE, VANBRUGH, AND FARQUHAR.

Comedy is a "graceful ornament to the civil order; the Corinthian capital of polished society." Like the mirrors which have been added to the sides of one of our theatres,* it reflects the images of grace, of gaiety, and pleasure double, and completes the perspective of human life. To read a good comedy is to keep the best company in the world, where the best things are said, and the most amusing happen. The wittiest remarks are always ready on the tongue, and the luckiest occasions are always at hand to give birth to the happiest conceptions. Sense makes strange havoc of nonsense. Refinement acts as a foil to affectation, and affectation to ignorance. Sentence after sentence tells. We don't know which to admire most, the observation or the answer to it. We would give our fingers to be able to talk so ourselves, or to hear others talk so. In turning over the pages of the best comedies, we are almost transported to another world, and escape from this dull age to one that was all life, and whim, and mirth, and humour. The curtain rises, and a gayer scene presents itself, as on the canvas of Watteau. We are admitted behind the scenes like spectators at court, on a levee or birthday; but it is the court, the gala day of wit and pleasure, of gallantry and Charles II! What an air breathes from the name! what a rustling of silks and waving of plumes! what a sparkling of diamond earrings and shoe-buckles! What bright eyes (Ah, those

* Covent Garden, where the writer was accustomed to occupy what was known as the Looking-glass Box.—Ed.

were Waller's Sacharissa's * as she passed.)! what killing looks and graceful motions! How the faces of the whole ring are dressed in smiles! how the repartee goes round! how wit and folly, elegance and awkward imitation of it, set one another off! Happy, thoughtless age, when kings and nobles led purely ornamental lives; when the utmost stretch of a morning's study went no farther than the choice of a sword-knot, or the adjustment of a side-curl; when the soul spoke out in all the pleasing eloquence of dress; and beaux and belles, enamoured of themselves in one another's follies, fluttered like gilded butterflies, in giddy mazes, through the walks of St. James's Park!

The four principal writers of this style of comedy (which I think the best) are undoubtedly Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Farquhar. The dawn was in Etherege, as its latest close was in Sheridan.—It is hard to say which of these four is best, or in what each of them excels, they had so many and such great excellences.

Congreve is the most distinct from the others, and the most easily defined, both from what he possessed and from what he wanted. He had by far the most wit and elegance, with less of other things, of humour, character, incident, &c. His style is inimitable, nay perfect. It is the highest model of comic dialogue. Every sentence is replete with sense and satire, conveyed in the most polished and pointed terms. Every page presents a shower of brilliant conceits, is a tissue of epigrams in prose, is a new triumph of wit, a new conquest over dulness. The fire of artful raillery is nowhere else so well kept up. This style, which he was almost the first to introduce, and which he carried to the utmost pitch of classical refinement, reminds one exactly of Collins's description of wit as opposed to humour,

> "Whose jewels in his crisped hair
> Are placed each other's light to share."

* The Lady Dorothy Sydney.—Ed.

Sheridan will not bear a comparison with him in the regular antithetical construction of his sentences, and in the mechanical artifices of his style, though so much later, and though style in general has been so much studied, and in the mechanical part so much improved since then. It bears every mark of being what he himself in the dedication of one of his plays tells us that it was, a spirited copy taken off and carefully revised from the most select society of his time, exhibiting all the sprightliness, ease, and animation of familiar conversation, with the correctness and delicacy of the most finished composition. His works are a singular treat to those who have cultivated a taste for the niceties of English style: there is a peculiar flavour in the very words, which is to be found in hardly any other writer. To the mere reader his writings would be an irreparable loss: to the stage they are already become a dead letter, with the exception of one of them, 'Love for Love.' This play is as full of character, incident, and stage-effect, as almost any of those of his contemporaries, and fuller of wit than any of his own, except perhaps the 'Way of the World.' It still acts, and is still acted well. The effect of it is prodigious on the well-informed spectator. In particular, Munden's 'Foresight,' if it is not just the thing, is a wonderfully rich and powerful piece of comic acting. His look is planet-struck; his dress and appearance like one of the signs of the Zodiac taken down. Nothing can be more bewildered; and it only wants a little more helplessness, a little more of the doating querulous garrulity of age, to be all that one conceives of the superannuated, star-gazing original. The gay, unconcerned opening of this play, and the romantic generosity of the conclusion, where Valentine, when about to resign his mistress, declares—"I never valued fortune, but as it was subservient to my pleasure; and my only pleasure was to please this lady,"—are alike admirable. The peremptory bluntness and exaggerated

descriptions of Sir Sampson Legend are in a vein truly oriental, with a Shakspearian cast of language, and form a striking contrast to the quaint credulity and senseless superstitions of Foresight. The remonstrance of his son to him, "to divest him, along with his inheritance, of his reason, thoughts, passions, inclinations, affections, appetites, senses, and the huge train of attendants which he brought into the world with him," with his valet's accompanying comments, is one of the most eloquent and spirited specimens of wit, pathos, and morality, that is to be found. The short scene with Trapland, the money-broker, is of the first water. What a picture is here drawn of Tattle! "More misfortunes, Sir!" says Jeremy. "*Valentine.* What, another dun? "*Jeremy.* No, Sir, but Mr. Tattle is come to wait upon you." What an introduction to give of an honest gentleman in the shape of a misfortune! The scenes between him, Miss Prue, and Ben, are of a highly coloured description. Mrs. Frail and Mrs. Foresight are "sisters every way;" and the bodkin which Mrs. Foresight brings as a proof of her sister's levity of conduct, and which is so convincingly turned against her as a demonstration of her own—"Nay, if you come to that, where did you find that bodkin?"—is one of the trophies of the moral justice of the comic drama. The 'Old Bachelor' and 'Double Dealer' are inferior to 'Love for Love,' but one is never tired of reading them. The fault of the last is, that Lady Touchwood approaches, in the turbulent impetuosity of her character, and measured tone of her declamation, too near to the tragedy-queen: and that Maskwell's plots puzzle the brain by their intricacy, as they stagger our belief by their gratuitous villany. Sir Paul and Lady Pliant, and my Lord and Lady Froth, are also scarcely credible in the extravagant insipidity and romantic vein of their follies, in which they are notably seconded by the lively Mr. Brisk and "dying Ned Careless."

The 'Way of the World' was the author's last and most carefully finished performance. It is an essence almost too fine; and the sense of pleasure evaporates in an aspiration after something that seems too exquisite ever to have been realised. After inhaling the spirit of Congreve's wit, and tasting "love's thrice reputed nectar" in his works, the head grows giddy in turning from the highest point of rapture to the ordinary business of life; and we can with difficulty recall the truant fancy to those objects which we are fain to take up with here, *for better, for worse.* What can be more enchanting than Millamant and her morning thoughts, her *doux sommeils?* What more provoking than her reproach to her lover, who proposes to rise early, "Ah! idle creature!" The meeting of these two lovers after the abrupt dismissal of Sir Wilful, is the height of careless and voluptuous elegance, as if they moved in air, and drank a finer spirit of humanity.

> "*Millamant.* Like Phœbus sung the no less amorous boy.
> *Mirabell.* Like Daphne she, as lovely and as coy."

Millamant is the perfect model of the accomplished fine lady:

> "Come, then, the colours and the ground prepare,
> Dip in the rainbow, trick her off in air;
> Choose a firm cloud, before it falls, and in it
> Catch, ere she change, the Cynthia of a minute."

She is the ideal heroine of the comedy of high life, who arrives at the height of indifference to everything from the height of satisfaction; to whom pleasure is as familiar as the air she draws; elegance worn as a part of her dress; wit the habitual language which she hears and speaks; love, a matter of course; and who has nothing to hope or to fear, her own caprice being the only law to herself and rule to those about her. Her words seem composed of amorou

sighs; her looks are glanced at prostrate admirers or envious rivals.

> "If there's delight in love, 'tis when I see
> That heart that others bleed for, bleed for me."

She refines on her pleasures to satiety; and is almost stifled in the incense that is offered to her person, her wit, her beauty, and her fortune. Secure of triumph, her slaves tremble at her frown: her charms are so irresistible, that her conquests give her neither surprise nor concern. "Beauty the lover's gift?" she exclaims, in answer to Mirabell—"Dear me, what is a lover that it can give? Why one makes lovers as fast as one pleases, and they live as long as one pleases, and they die as soon as one pleases; and then if one pleases, one makes more." We are not sorry to see her tamed down at last, from her pride of love and beauty, into a wife. She is good-natured and generous, with all her temptations to the contrary; and her behaviour to Mirabell reconciles us to her treatment of Witwoud and Petulant, and of her country admirer, Sir Wilful.

Congreve has described all this in his character of Millamant, but he has done no more; and if he had, he would have done wrong. He has given us the finest idea of an artificial character of this kind; but it is still the reflection of an artificial character. The springs of nature, passion, or imagination are but feebly touched. The impressions appealed to, and with masterly address, are habitual, external, and conventional advantages; the ideas of birth, of fortune, of connexions, of dress, accomplishment, fashion, the opinion of the world, of crowds of admirers, continually come into play, flatter our vanity, bribe our interest, soothe our indolence, fall in with our prejudices;—it is these that support the goddess of our idolatry, with which she is everything, and without which she would be nothing. The mere fine lady of comedy, compared with the heroine of romance or poetry, when

stripped of her adventitious ornaments and advantages, is too much like the doll stripped of its finery. In thinking of Millamant, we think almost as much of her dress as of her person: it is not so with respect to Rosalind or Perdita. The poet has painted them differently; in colours which "nature's own sweet and cunning hand laid on," with health, with innocence, with gaiety, "wild wit, invention ever new;" with pure red and white, like the wilding's blossoms; with warbled wood-notes, like the feathered choir's; with thoughts fluttering on the wings of imagination, and hearts panting and breathless with eager delight. The interest we feel is in themselves; the admiration they excite is for themselves. They do not depend upon the drapery of circumstances. It is nature that "blazons herself" in them. Imogen is the same in a lonely cave as in a court; nay more, for she there seems something heavenly—a spirit or a vision; and, as it were, shames her destiny, brighter for the foil of circumstances. Millamant is nothing but a fine lady; and all her airs and affectation would be blown away with the first breath of misfortune. Enviable in drawing-rooms, adorable at her toilette, fashion, like a witch, has thrown its spell around her; but if that spell were broken, her power of fascination would be gone. For that reason I think the character better adapted for the stage: it is more artificial, more theatrical, more meretricious. I would rather have seen Mrs. Abington's Millamant, than any Rosalind that ever appeared on the stage. Somehow, this sort of acquired elegance is more a thing of costume, of air and manner; and in comedy, or on the comic stage, the light and familiar, the trifling, superficial and agreeable, bears, perhaps, rightful sway over that which touches the affections, or exhausts the fancy. There is a callousness in the worst characters in the 'Way of the World,' in Fainall, and his wife and Mrs. Marwood, not very pleasant; and a grossness in the

absurd ones, such as Lady Wishfort and Sir Wilful, which is not a little amusing. Witwoud wishes to disclaim, as far as he can, his relationship to this last character, and says, "he's but his half brother;" to which Mirabell makes answer—"Then, perhaps, he's but half a fool." Peg is an admirable caricature of rustic awkwardness and simplicity, which is carried to excess without any offence, from a sense of contrast to the refinement of the chief characters in the play. The description of Lady Wishfort's face is a perfect piece of painting. The force of style in this author at times amounts to poetry. Waitwell, who personates Sir Rowland, and Foible, his accomplice in the matrimonial scheme upon her mistress, hang as a dead weight upon the plot. They are mere tools in the hands of Mirabell, and want life and interest. Congreve's characters can all of them speak well, they are mere machines when they come to act. Our author's superiority deserted him almost entirely with his wit. His serious and tragic poetry is frigid and jejune to an unaccountable degree. His *forte* was the description of actual manners, whether elegant or absurd; and when he could not deride the one or embellish the other, his attempts at romantic passion or imaginary enthusiasm are forced, abortive, and ridiculous, or commonplace. The description of the ruins of a temple in the beginning of the 'Mourning Bride,' was a great stretch of his poetic genius. It has, however, been over-rated, particularly by Dr. Johnson, who could have done nearly as well himself for a single passage in the same style of moralising and sentimental description. To justify this general censure, and to show how the lightest and most graceful wit degenerates into the heaviest and most bombastic poetry, I will give one description out of his tragedy, which will be enough. It is the speech which Gonsalez addresses to Almeria:

> "Be every day of your long life like this.
> The sun, bright conquest, and your brighter eyes

Have all conspired to blaze promiscuous light,
And bless this day with most unequal lustre.
Your royal father, my victorious lord,
Loaden with spoils, and ever-living laurel,
Is entering now, in martial pomp, the palace.
Five hundred mules precede his solemn march,
Which groan beneath the weight of Moorish wealth.
Chariots of war, adorn'd with glittering gems,
Succeed; and next, a hundred neighing steeds,
White as the fleecy rain on Alpine hills;
That bound, and foam, and champ the golden bit,
As they disdain'd the victory they grace.
Prisoners of war in shining fetters follow:
And captains of the noblest blood of Afric
Sweat by his chariot-wheels, and lick and grind,
With gnashing teeth, the dust his triumphs raise.
The swarming populace spread every wall,
And cling, as if with claws they did enforce
Their hold, through clifted stones stretching and staring
As if they were all eyes, and every limb
Would feed its faculty of admiration,
While you alone retire, and shun this sight;
This sight, which is indeed not seen (though twice
The multitude should gaze) in absence of your eyes."

This passage seems, in part, an imitation of Bolingbroke's entry into London. The style is as different from Shakspeare as it is from that of Witwoud and Petulant. It is plain that the imagination of the author could not raise itself above the burlesque. His 'Mask of Semele,' 'Judgment of Paris,' and other occasional poems, are even worse. I would not advise any one to read them, or if I did, they would not.

Wycherley was before Congreve; and his 'Country Wife' will last longer than anything of Congreve's as a popular acting play. It is only a pity that it is not entirely his own;* but it is enough so to do him never-ceasing honour, for the best things are his own. His humour is, in general, broader, his characters more natural, and his

* Being partly borrowed from Molière, as has been already mentioned.—Ed.

incidents more striking than Congreve's. It may be said of Congreve, that the workmanship overlays the materials: in Wycherley, the casting of the parts and the fable are alone sufficient to ensure success. We forget Congreve's characters, and only remember what they say: we remember Wycherley's characters, and the incidents they meet with, just as if they were real, and forget what they say, comparatively speaking. Miss Peggy (or Mrs. Margery Pinchwife) is a character that will last for ever, I should hope; and even when the original is no more, if that should ever be, while self-will, curiosity, art, and ignorance are to be found in the same person, it will be just as good and as intelligible as ever in the description, because it is built on first principles, and brought out in the fullest and broadest manner. Agnes, in Molière's play, has a great deal of the same unconscious impulse and heedless *naïvetè*, but hers is sentimentalised and varnished over (in the French fashion) with long-winded apologies and analytical distinctions. It wants the same simple force and *home* truth. It is not so direct and downright. Miss Peggy is not even a novice in casuistry: she blurts out her meaning before she knows what she is saying, and she speaks her mind by her actions oftener than by her words. The outline of the plot is the same; but the point-blank hits and master-strokes, the sudden thoughts and delightful expedients—such as her changing the letters, the meeting her husband plump in the Park as she is running away from him as fast as her heels can carry her, her being turned out of doors by her jealous booby of a husband, and sent by him to her lover disguised as Alicia, her sister-in-law—occur first in the modern play. There are scarcely any incidents or situations on the stage which tell like these for pantomimic effect, which give such a tingling to the blood, or so completely take away the breath with expectation and surprise. Miss Prue, in 'Love for Love' is a lively reflection of

Miss Peggy, but without the bottom and weight of metal. Hoyden is a match for her in constitution and complete effect, as Corinna, in the 'Confederacy,' is in mischief: but without the wit. Mrs. Jordan used to play all these characters; and as she played them, it was hard to know which was best. Pinchwife, or Moody (as he is at present called *), is, like others of Wycherley's moral characters, too rustic, abrupt, and cynical. He is a more disagreeable, but less tedious character, than the husband of Agnes, and both seem, by all accounts, to have been rightly served. The character of Sparkish is quite new, and admirably hit off. He is an exquisite and suffocating coxcomb; a pretender to wit and letters, without common understanding, or the use of his senses. The class of character is thoroughly exposed and understood; but he persists in his absurd conduct so far, that it becomes extravagant and disgusting, if not incredible, from mere weakness and foppery. Yet there is something in him that we are inclined to tolerate at first, as his professing that "with him a wit is the first title to respect;" and we regard his unwillingness to be pushed out of the room, and coming back, in spite of their teeth, to keep the company of wits and raillers, as a favourable omen. But he utterly disgraces his pretensions before he has done. With all his faults and absurdities, he is, however, a much less offensive character than Tattle. Horner is a stretch of probability in the first concoction of that ambiguous character (for he does not appear at present on the stage as Wycherley made him); but notwithstanding the indecency and indirectness of the means he employs to carry his plans into effect, he deserves every sort of consideration and forgiveness, both for the display of his own ingenuity, and the deep insight he discovers into human nature—such as it was in the time of Wycherley. The author has commented on this character,

* *i.e.* In 1818.—Ed.

and the double meaning of the name, in his 'Plain Dealer,' borrowing the remarks, and almost the very words, of Molière, who has brought forward and defended his own work against the objections of the precise part of his audience in his *Critique de l' Ecole des Femmes.* There is no great harm in these occasional plagiarisms, except that they make one uncomfortable at other times, and distrustful of the originality of the whole. The 'Plain Dealer' is Wycherley's next best work, and is a most severe and poignant moral satire. There is a heaviness about it indeed, an extravagance, an overdoing both in the style, the plot, and characters; but the truth of feeling and the force of interest prevail over every objection. The character of Manly, the Plain Dealer, is violent, repulsive and uncouth, which is a fault, though one that seems to have been intended for the sake of contrast; for the portrait of consummate, artful hypocrisy in Olivia is perhaps rendered more striking by it. The indignation excited against this odious and pernicious quality by the masterly exposure to which it is here subjected, is "a discipline of humanity." No one can read this play attentively without being the better for it as long as he lives. It penetrates to the core; it shows the immorality and hateful effects of duplicity, by showing it fixing its harpy fangs in the heart of an honest and worthy man. It is worth ten volumes of sermons. The scenes between Manly after his return, Olivia, Plausible, and Novel, are instructive examples of unblushing impudence, of shallow pretensions to principle, and of the most mortifying reflections on his own situation, and bitter sense of female injustice and ingratitude on the part of Manly. The devil of hypocrisy and hardened assurance seems worked up to the highest pitch of conceivable effrontery in Olivia, when, after confiding to her cousin the story of her infamy, she in a moment turns round upon her for some sudden purpose, and affecting not to know the meaning of

the other's allusions to what she has just told her, reproaches her with forging insinuations to the prejudice of her character and in violation of their friendship. "Go! you're a censorious ill woman." This is more trying to the patience than anything in the 'Tartuffe.' The name of this heroine, and her overtures to Fidelia as the page, seem to have been suggested by 'Twelfth Night.' It is curious to see how the same subject is treated by two such different authors as Shakspeare and Wycherley. The widow Blackacre and her son are like her lawsuit—everlasting. A more lively, palpable, bustling, ridiculous picture cannot be drawn. Jerry is a hopeful lad, though undutiful, and gets out of bad hands into worse. Goldsmith evidently had an eye to these two precious characters in 'She Stoops to Conquer.' Tony Lumpkin and his mother are of the same family, and the incident of the theft of the casket of jewels and the bag of parchments is nearly the same in both authors. Wycherley's other plays are not so good. The 'Gentleman Dancing Master' is a long, foolish farce, in the exaggerated manner of Molière, but without his spirit or whimsical invention. 'Love in a Wood,' though not what one would wish it to be for the author's sake or our own, is much better, and abounds in several rich and highly-coloured scenes, particularly those in which Miss Lucy, her mother Crossbite, Dapperwit, and Alderman Gripe are concerned. Some of the subordinate characters and intrigues in this comedy are grievously spun out. Wycherley, when he got hold of a good thing, or sometimes even of a bad one, was determined to make the most of it, and might have said with Dogberry truly enough, "Had I the tediousness of a king, I could find in my heart to bestow it all upon your worships." In reading this author's best works—those which one reads most frequently over, and knows almost by heart, one cannot help thinking of the treatment he received from Pope about his verses. It

was hardly excusable in a boy of sixteen to an old man of seventy.

Vanbrugh comes next, and holds his own fully with the best. He is no writer at all as to mere authorship; but he makes up for it by a prodigious fund of comic invention and ludicrous description, bordering somewhat on caricature. Though he did not borrow from him, he was much more like Molière in genius than Wycherley was, who professedly imitated him. He has none of Congreve's graceful refinement, and as little of Wycherley's serious manner and studied insight into the springs of character; but his exhibition of [w]it * in dramatic contrast and unlooked-for situations, where the different parties play upon one another's failings, and into one another's hands, keeping up the jest like a game at battledore-and-shuttlecock, and urging it to the utmost verge of breathless extravagance, in the mere eagerness of the fray, is beyond that of any other of our writers. His fable is not so profoundly laid, nor his characters so well digested, as Wycherley's (who, in these respects, bore some resemblance to Fielding). Vanbrugh does not lay the same deliberate train from the outset to the conclusion, so that the whole may hang together, and tend inevitably from the combination of different agents and circumstances to the same decisive point; but he works out scene after scene, on the spur of the occasion, and from the immediate hold they take of his imagination at the moment, without any previous bias or ultimate purpose, much more powerfully, with more *verve*, and in a richer vein of original invention. His fancy warms and burnishes out as if he were engaged in the real scene of action, and felt all his faculties suddenly called forth to meet the emergency. He has more nature than art: what he does best, he does because he cannot help it. He has a masterly eye to the

* *It* in the original edition; but a letter seems to have dropped out at press, as the sense requires *wit*, or some equivalent word.—Ed.

advantages which certain accidental situations of character present to him on the spot, and he executes the most difficult and rapid theatrical movements at a moment's warning. Of this kind are the inimitable scenes in the 'Provoked Wife,' between Razor and Mademoiselle, where they repeat and act over again the rencontre in the Mulberry-walk between Constant and his mistress, than which nothing was ever more happily conceived, or done to more absolute perfection. That again in the 'Relapse,' where Loveless pushes Berinthia into the closet; the sudden meeting in the 'Confederacy' between Dick and Mrs. Amlet; the altercation about the letter between Flippanta and Corinna, in the same play, and that again where Brass, at the house of Gripe the money-scrivener, threatens to discover his friend and accomplice, and by talking louder and louder to him, as he tries to evade his demands, extorts a grudging submission from him. This last scene is as follows:—

"*Dick.* I wish my old hobbling mother han't been blabbing something here she should not do.

Brass. Fear nothing, all's safe on that side yet. But how speaks young mistress's epistle? soft and tender?

Dick. As pen can write.

Brass. So you think all goes well there?

Dick. As my heart can wish.

Brass. You are sure on't!

Dick. Sure on't!

Brass. Why then, ceremony aside—[*Putting on his hat*]—you and I must have a little talk, Mr. Amlet.

Dick. Ah, Brass, what art thou going to do? wo't ruin me?

Brass. Look you, Dick, few words; you are in a smooth way of making your fortune; I hope all will roll on. But how do you intend matters shall pass 'twixt you and me in this business?

Dick. Death and furies! What a time dost take to talk on't?

Brass. Good words, or I betray you; they have already heard of one Mr. Amlet in the house.

Dick. Here's a son of a whore. [*Aside.*

Brass. In short, look smooth, and be a good prince. I am your valet, 'tis true: your footman, sometimes, which I'm enraged at; but you have always had the ascendant I confess: when we were

schoolfellows, you made me carry your books, make your exercise, own your rogueries, and sometimes take a whipping for you. When we were fellow-'prentices, though I was your senior, you made me open the shop, clean my master's shoes, cut last at dinner, and eat all the crust. In our sins too, I must own you still kept me under; you soar'd up to adultery with the mistress, while I was at humble fornication with the maid. Nay, in our punishments you still made good your post; for when once upon a time I was sentenced but to be whipp'd, I cannot deny but you were condemn'd to be hang'd. So that in all times, I must confess, your inclinations have been greater and nobler than mine; however, I cannot consent that you should at once fix fortune for life, and I dwell in my humilities for the rest of my days.

Dick. Hark thee, Brass, if I do not most nobly by thee, I'm a dog.

Brass. And when?

Dick. As soon as ever I am married.

Brass. Ay, the plague take thee.

Dick. Then you mistrust me?

Brass. I do, by my faith. Look you, Sir, some folks we mistrust, because we don't know them: others we mistrust, because we do know them: and for one of these reasons I desire there may be a bargain beforehand: if not [*raising his voice*] look ye, Dick Amlet—

Dick. Soft, my dear friend and companion. The dog will ruin me [*Aside*]. Say, what is't will content thee?

Brass. O ho!

Dick. But how canst thou be such a barbarian?

Brass. I learnt it at Algiers.

Dick. Come, make thy Turkish demand then.

Brass. You know you gave me a bank-bill this morning to receive for you.

Dick. I did so, of fifty pounds; 'tis thine. So, now thou art satisfied; all is fixed.

Brass. It is not indeed. There's a diamond necklace you robb'd your mother of e'en now.

Dick. Ah, you Jew!

Brass. No words.

Dick. My dear Brass!

Brass. I insist.

Dick. My old friend!

Brass. Dick Amlet [*raising his voice*] I insist.

Dick. Ah, the cormorant [*Aside*].—Well, 'tis thine: thou'lt never thrive with it.

Brass. When I find it begins to do me mischief, I'll give it you again. But I must have a wedding suit.

Dick. Well.

Brass. A stock of linen.

Dick. Enough.

Brass. Not yet——a silver-hilted sword.

Dick. Well, thou shalt have that too. Now thou hast everything.

Brass. Heav'n forgive me, I forgot a ring of remembrance. I would not forget all these favours for the world: a sparkling diamond will be always playing in my eye, and put me in mind of them.

Dick. This unconscionable rogue! [*Aside*]—Well, I'll bespeak one for thee.

Brass. Brilliant.

Dick. It shall. But if the thing don't succeed after all—

Brass. I am a man of honour and restore: and so, the treaty being finish'd, I strike my flag of defiance, and fall into my respects again." [*Takes off his hat.*

The 'Confederacy' is a comedy of infinite contrivance and intrigue, with a matchless spirit of impudence. It is a fine careless *exposé* of heartless want of principle; for there is no anger or severity against vice expressed in it, as in Wycherley. The author's morality in all cases (except his 'Provoked Wife,' which was undertaken as a penance for past peccadilloes) sits very loose upon him. It is a little upon the turn; "it does somewhat smack." Old Palmer, as Dick Amlet, asking his mother's blessing on his knee, was the very idea of a graceless son.—His sweetheart Corinna is a Miss Prue, but nature works in her more powerfully.—Lord Foppington, in the 'Relapse,' is a most splendid caricature: he is a personification of the foppery and folly of dress and external appearance in full feather. He blazes out and dazzles sober reason with ridiculous ostentation. Still I think this character is a copy from Etherege's 'Sir Fopling Flutter,' and upon the whole, perhaps, Sir Fopling is the more natural grotesque of the two. His soul is more in his dress; he is a more disinterested coxcomb. The lord is an ostentatious, strutting, vain-glorious blockhead; the knight is an unaffected, self-complacent, serious admirer

of his equipage and person. For instance, what they severally say on the subject of contemplating themselves in the glass, is a proof of this. Sir Fopling thinks a looking-glass in the room "the best company in the world;" it is another self to him: Lord Foppington merely considers it as necessary to adjust his appearance, that he may make a figure in company. The finery of the one has an imposing air of grandeur about it, and is studied for effect: the other is really in love with a laced suit, and is hand and glove with the newest-cut fashion. He really thinks his tailor or peruke-maker the greatest man in the world, while his lordship treats them familiarly as necessary appendages of his person. Still this coxcomb-nobleman's effeminacy and mock-heroic vanity are admirably depicted, and held up to unrivalled ridicule; and his courtship of Miss Hoyden is excellent in all its stages, and ends oracularly.

"*Lord Foppington.*—Now, for my part, I think the wisest thing a man can do with an aching heart, is to put on a serene countenance; for a philosophical air is the most becoming thing in the world to the face of a person of quality: I will therefore bear my disgrace like a great man, and let the people see I am above an affront. [*then turning to his brother*] Dear Tam, since things are thus fallen out, pr'ythee give me leave to wish thee joy, I do it *de bon cœur*, strike me dumb: you have married a woman beautiful in her person, charming in her airs, prudent in her conduct, constant in her inclinations, and of a nice morality—stap my vitals!"

Poor Hoyden fares ill in his lordship's description of her, though she could expect no better at his hands for her desertion of him. She wants sentiment, to be sure, but she has other qualifications—she is a fine bouncing piece of flesh and blood. Her first announcement is decisive—"Let loose the greyhound, and lock up Hoyden." Her declaration, "It's well they've got me a husband, or ecod, I'd marry the baker," comes from her mouth like a shot from a culverin, and leaves no doubt, by its effect upon the ear, that she would have made it good in

the sequel, if she had not been provided for. Her indifference to the man she is to marry, and her attachment to the finery and the title, are justified by an attentive observation of nature in its simplest guise. There is, however, no harm in Hoyden; she merely wishes to consult her own inclination: she is by no means like Corinna in the 'Confederacy,' "a devilish girl at the bottom," nor is it her great delight to plague other people.—Sir Tunbelly Clumsy is the right worshipful and worthy father of so delicate an offspring. He is a coarse, substantial contrast to the flippant and flimsy Lord Foppington. If the one is not without reason "proud to be at the head of so prevailing a party" as that of coxcombs, the other may look big and console himself (under some affronts) with being a very competent representative, a knight of the shire, of the once formidable, though now obsolete class of country squires, who had no idea beyond the boundaries of their own estates, or the circumference of their own persons. His unwieldy dulness gives, by the rule of contraries, a lively sense of lightness and grace: his stupidity answers all the purposes of wit. His portly paunch repels a jest like a wool-sack: a sarcasm rebounds from him like a ball. His presence is a cure for gravity; and he is a standing satire upon himself and the class in natural history to which he belonged. Sir John Brute, in the 'Provoked Wife,' is an animal of the same English growth, but of a cross-grained breed. He has a spice of the demon mixed up with the brute; is mischievous as well as stupid; has improved his natural parts by a town education and example; opposes the fine-lady airs and graces of his wife by brawling oaths, impenetrable surliness, and pothouse valour; overpowers any tendency she might have to vapours or hysterics by the fumes of tobacco and strong beer, and thinks to be master in his own house by roaring in taverns, reeling home drunk

every night, breaking lamps, and beating the watch. He does not, however, find this lordly method answer. He turns out to be a coward as well as a bully, and dares not resent the injuries he has provoked by his unmanly behaviour. This was Garrick's favourite part; and I have heard that his acting in the drunken scene, in which he was disguised not as a clergyman, but as a woman of the town, which was an alteration of his own to suit the delicacy of the times, was irresistible. The ironical conversations in this play between Belinda and Lady Brute, as well as those in the 'Relapse' between Amanda and her cousin Berinthia, will do to compare with Congreve in the way of wit and studied raillery, but they will not stand the comparison. Araminta and Clarissa keep up the ball between them with more spirit, for their conversation is very like that of kept-mistresses; and the mixture of fashionable *slang* and professed want of principle gives a sort of zest and high seasoning to their confidential communications, which Vanbrugh could supply as well as anybody. But he could not do without the taint of grossness and licentiousness. Lady Townly is not the really vicious character, nor quite the fine lady, which the author would have her to be. Lady Grace is so far better; she is what she pretends to be, merely *sober* and insipid. Vanbrugh's *forte* was not the sentimental or didactic; his genius flags and grows dull when it is not put into action, and wants the stimulus of sudden emergency, or the fortuitous collision of different motives, to call out all its force and vivacity. His antitheses are happy and brilliant contrasts of character; his *double entendres* equivocal situations; his best jokes are practical devices, not epigrammatic conceits. His wit is that which is emphatically called *mother-wit*. It brings those who possess it, or to whom he lends it, into scrapes by its restlessness, and brings them out of them by its alacrity. Several of his favourite characters are

knavish, adroit adventurers, who have all the gipsy jargon, the cunning impudence, cool presence of mind, selfishness, and indefatigable industry; all the excuses, lying dexterity, the intellectual juggling and legerdemain tricks, necessary to fit them for this sort of predatory warfare on the simplicity, follies, or vices of mankind. He discovers the utmost dramatic generalship in bringing off his characters at a pinch, and by an instantaneous *ruse de guerre*, when the case seems hopeless in any other hands. The train of his associations, to express the same thing in metaphysical language, lies in following the suggestions of his fancy into every possible connexion of cause and effect, rather than into every possible combination of likeness or difference. His ablest characters show that they are so by displaying their ingenuity, address, and presence of mind in critical junctures, and in their own affairs, rather than their wisdom or their wit "in intellectual gladiatorship," or in speculating on the affairs and characters of other people.

Farquhar's chief characters are also adventurers; but they are adventurers of a romantic, not a knavish stamp, and succeed no less by their honesty than their boldness. They conquer their difficulties, and effect their "hair-breadth 'scapes" by the impulse of natural enthusiasm and the confidence of high principles of gallantry and honour, as much as by their dexterity and readiness at expedients. They are real gentlemen, and only pretended impostors. Vanbrugh's upstart heroes are without "any relish of salvation," without generosity, virtue, or any pretensions to it. We have little sympathy for them, and no respect at all. But we have every sort of good-will towards Farquhar's heroes, who have as many peccadilloes to answer for, and play as many rogue's tricks, but are honest fellows at bottom. I know little other difference between these two capital writers and copyists of nature,

than that Farquhar's nature is the better nature of the two. We seem to like both the author and his favourites. He has humour, character, and invention in common with the other, with a more unaffected gaiety and spirit of enjoyment, which overflows and sparkles in all he does. He makes us laugh from pleasure oftener than from malice. He somewhere prides himself in having introduced on the stage the class of comic heroes here spoken of, which has since become a standard character, and which represents the warm-hearted, rattle-brained, thoughtless, high-spirited young fellow, who floats on the back of his misfortunes without repining, who forfeits appearances, but saves his honour; and he gives us to understand that it was his own. He did not need to be ashamed of it. Indeed there is internal evidence that this sort of character is his own, for it pervades his works generally, and is the moving spirit that informs them. His comedies have on this account probably a greater appearance of truth and nature than almost any others. His incidents succeed one another with rapidity, but without premeditation; his wit is easy and spontaneous; his style animated, unembarrassed, and flowing; his characters full of life and spirit, and never overstrained so as to "o'erstep the modesty of nature," though they sometimes, from haste and carelessness, seem left in a crude, unfinished state. There is a constant ebullition of gay, laughing invention, cordial good humour, and fine animal spirits, in his writings.

Of the four writers here classed together, we should perhaps have courted Congreve's acquaintance most, for his wit and the elegance of his manners; Wycherley's, for his sense and observation on human nature; Vanbrugh's, for his power of farcical description and telling a story; Farquhar's, for the pleasure of his society, and the love of good fellowship. His fine gentlemen are not gentlemen of fortune and fashion, like those in Congreve;

but are rather "God Almighty's gentlemen." His valets are good fellows: even his chambermaids are some of them disinterested and sincere. But his fine ladies, it must be allowed, are not so amiable, so witty, or accomplished, as those in Congreve. Perhaps they both described women in high life as they found them: Congreve took their conversation, Farquhar their conduct. In the way of fashionable vice and petrifying affectation, there is nothing to come up to his 'Lady Lurewell,' in the 'Trip to the Jubilee.' She by no means makes good Mr. Burke's courtly and chivalrous observation, that the evil of vice consists principally in its want of refinement; and one benefit of the dramatic exhibition of such characters is, that they overturn false maxims of morality, and settle accounts fairly and satisfactorily between theory and practice. Her lover, Colonel Standard, is indeed an awkward incumbrance upon so fine a lady: it was a character that the poet did not like; and he has merely sketched him in, leaving him to answer for himself as well as he could, which is but badly. We have no suspicion, either from his conduct, or from any hint dropped by accident, that he is the first seducer and the possessor of the virgin affections of Lady Lurewell. The double transformation of this virago from vice to virtue, and from virtue to vice again, her plausible pretensions and artful wiles, her violent temper and dissolute passions, show a thorough knowledge of the effects both of nature and habit in making up human character. Farquhar's own heedless turn for gallantry would be likely to throw him upon such a character; and his goodness of heart and sincerity of disposition would teach him to expose its wanton duplicity and gilded rottenness. Lurewell is almost as abandoned a character as Olivia in the 'Plain Dealer;' but the indignation excited against her is of a less serious and tragic cast. Her peevish disgust and affected horror at everything that comes near her, form a

very edifying picture. Her dissatisfaction and *ennui* are not mere airs and graces worn for fashion's sake; but are real and tormenting inmates of her breast, arising from a surfeit of pleasure and the consciousness of guilt. All that is hateful in the caprice, ill humour, spite, *hauteur*, folly, impudence, and affectation of the complete woman of quality, is contained in the scene between her and her servants in the first act. The depravity would be intolerable, even in imagination, if the weakness were not ludicrous in the extreme. It shows, in the highest degree, the power of circumstances and example to pervert the understanding, the imagination, and even the senses. The manner in which the character of the gay, wild, free-hearted, but not altogether profligate or unfeeling Sir Harry Wildair, is played off against the designing, vindictive, imperious, uncontrollable, and unreasonable humours of Lurewell, in the scene where she tries to convince him of his wife's infidelity, while he stops his ears to her pretended proofs, is not surpassed in modern comedy. I shall give it here :—

"*Wildair.* Now, dear madam, I have secur'd my brother, you have dispos'd of the colonel, and we'll rail at love till we ha'n't a word more to say.

Lurewell. Ay, Sir Harry. Please to sit a little, Sir. You must know I'm in a strange humour of asking you some questions. How did you like your lady, pray, Sir?

Wild. Like her! Ha, ha, ha. So very well, faith, that for her very sake I'm in love with every woman I meet.

Lure. And did matrimony please you extremely?

Wild. So very much, that if polygamy were allow'd, I would have a new wife every day.

Lure. Oh, Sir Harry! this is raillery. But your serious thoughts upon the matter, pray.

Wild. Why then, Madam, to give you my true sentiments of wedlock: I had a lady that I married by chance, she was virtuous by chance, and I lov'd her by great chance. Nature gave her beauty, education an air; and fortune threw a young fellow of five-and-twenty in her lap. I courted her all day, lov'd her all night; she was my mistress one day, and my wife another: I found

in one the variety of a thousand, and the very confinement of marriage gave me the pleasure of change.

Lure. And she was very virtuous.

Wild. Look ye, Madam, you know she was beautiful. She had good nature about her mouth, the smile of beauty in her cheeks, sparkling wit in her forehead, and sprightly love in her eyes.

Lure. Pshaw! I knew her very well; the woman was well enough. But you don't answer my question, Sir.

Wild. So, Madam, as I told you before, she was young and beautiful, I was rich and vigorous; my estate gave a lustre to my love, and a swing to our enjoyment; round, like the ring that made us one, our golden pleasures circled without end.

Lure. Golden pleasures! Golden fiddlesticks. What d'ye tell me of your canting stuff? Was she virtuous, I say?

Wild. Ready to burst with envy; but I will torment thee a little. [*Aside.*] So, Madam, I powder'd to please her, she dress'd to engage me; we toy'd away the morning in amorous nonsense, loll'd away the evening in the park or the playhouse, and all the night—hem!

Lure. Look ye, Sir, answer my question, or I shall take it ill.

Wild. Then, Madam, there was never such a pattern of unity. Her wants were still prevented by my supplies; my own heart whisper'd me her desires, 'cause she herself was there; no contention ever rose, but the dear strife of who should most oblige: no noise about authority; for neither would stoop to command, 'cause both thought it glory to obey.

Lure. Stuff! stuff! stuff! I won't believe a word on't.

Wild. Ha, ha, ha. Then, Madam, we never felt the yoke of matrimony, because our inclinations made us one—a power superior to the forms of wedlock. The marriage torch had lost its weaker light in the bright flame of mutual love that join'd our hearts before; then—

Lure. Hold, hold, Sir; I cannot bear it; Sir Harry, I'm affronted.

Wild. Ha, ha, ha. Affronted!

Lure. Yes, Sir; 'tis an affront to any woman to hear another commended; and I will resent it. In short, Sir Harry, your wife was a—

Wild. Buz, Madam—no detraction. I'll tell you what she was. So much an angel in her conduct, that though I saw another in her arms, I should have thought the devil had rais'd the phantom, and my more conscious reason had given my eyes the lie.

Lure. Very well! Then I a'n't to be believ'd, it seems. But, d'ye hear, Sir?

Wild. Nay, Madam, do you hear! I tell you, 'tis not in the

power of malice to cast a blot upon her fame; and though the vanity of our sex, and the envy of yours, conspir'd both against her honour, I would not hear a syllable. [*Stopping his ears.*

Lure. Why then, as I hope to breathe, you shall hear it. The picture! the picture! the picture! [*Bawling aloud.*

Wild. Ran, tan, tan. A pistol-bullet from ear to ear.

Lure. That picture which you had just now from the French marquis for a thousand pound; that very picture did your very virtuous wife send to the marquis as a pledge of her very virtuous and dying affection. So that you are both robb'd of your honour and cheated of your money. [*Aloud.*

Wild. Louder, louder, Madam.

Lure. I tell you, Sir, your wife was a jilt; I know it, I'll swear it.—She virtuous! She was a devil!

Wild. [*Sings.*] Tal, al, deral.

Lure. Was ever the like seen! He won't hear me. I burst with malice, and now he won't mind me! Won't you hear me yet?

Wild. No, no, Madam.

Lure. Nay, then I can't bear it. [*Bursts out a crying.*] Sir, I must say that you're an unworthy person, to use a woman of quality at this rate, when she has her heart full of malice; I don't know but it may make me miscarry. Sir, I say again and again, that she was no better than one of us, and I know it; I have seen it with my eyes, so I have.

Wild. Good heav'ns deliver me, I beseech thee. How shall I 'scape!

Lure. Will you hear me yet? Dear Sir Harry, do but hear me; I'm longing to speak.

Wild. Oh! I have it.—Hush, hush, hush.

Lure. Eh! what's the matter?

Wild. A mouse! a mouse! a mouse!

Lure. Where? where? where?

Wild. Your petticoats, your petticoats, Madam. [*Lurewell shrieks and runs.*] O my head! I was never worsted by a woman before. But I have heard so much to know the marquis to be a villain. [*Knocking.*] Nay, then, I must run for't. [*Runs out, and returns.*] The entry is stopt by a chair coming in; and something there is in that chair that I will discover, if I can find a place to hide myself. [*Goes to the closet door.*] Fast! I have keys about me for most locks about St. James's. Let me see. [*Tries one key.*] No, no; this opens my Lady Plantborn's back-door. [*Tries another.*] Nor this; this is the key to my Lady Stakeall's garden. [*Tries a third.*] Ay, ay, this does it, faith. [*Goes into the closet.*]"

The dialogue between Cherry and Archer, in the 'Beaux'

Stratagem,' in which she repeats her well-conned love catechism, is as good as this, but not so fit to be repeated anywhere but on the stage. The 'Beaux' Stratagem' is the best of his plays, as a whole; infinitely lively, bustling, and full of point and interest. The assumed disguise of the two principal characters, Archer and Aimwell, is a perpetual amusement to the mind. Scrub is an indispensable appendage to a country gentleman's kitchen, and an exquisite confidant for the secrets of young ladies. The 'Recruiting Officer' is not one of Farquhar's best comedies, though it is light and entertaining. It contains chiefly sketches and hints of characters, and the conclusion of the plot is rather lame. He informs us, in the dedication to the published play, that it was founded on some local and personal circumstances that happened in Shropshire, where he was himself a recruiting officer; and it seems not unlikely that most of the scenes actually took place at the foot of the Wrekin. The 'Inconstant' is much superior to it. The romantic interest and impressive catastrophe of this play I thought had been borrowed from the more poetical and tragedy-practised muse of Beaumont and Fletcher; but I find they are taken from an actual circumstance which took place, in the author's knowledge, at Paris. His other pieces, 'Love and a Bottle,' and the 'Twin Rivals,' are not on a par with these; and are no longer in possession of the stage. The public are, after all, not the worst judges. Farquhar's 'Letters,' prefixed to the collection of his plays, are lively, good-humoured, and sensible; and contain, among other things, an admirable exposition of the futility of the dramatic unities of time and place. This criticism preceded Dennis's remarks on that subject, in his 'Strictures on Mr. Addison's Cato;' and completely anticipates all that Dr. Johnson has urged so unanswerably on the subject, in his preface to 'Shakspeare.'

We may date the decline of English comedy from the

time of Farquhar. For this several causes might be assigned in the political and moral changes of the times; but among other minor ones, Jeremy Collier, in his 'View of the English Stage,' frightened the poets, and did all he could to spoil the stage, by pretending to reform it: that is, by making it an echo of the pulpit, instead of a reflection of the manners of the world. He complains bitterly of the profaneness of the stage; and is for fining the actors for every oath they utter, to put an end to the practice; as if common swearing had been an invention of the poets and stage-players. He cannot endure that the fine gentlemen drink, and the fine ladies intrigue, in the scenes of Congreve and Wycherley, when things so contrary to law and gospel happened nowhere else. He is vehement against duelling, as a barbarous custom of which the example is suffered with impunity nowhere but on the stage. He is shocked at the number of fortunes that are irreparably ruined by the vice of gaming on the boards of the theatres. He seems to think that every breach of the ten commandments begins and ends there. He complains that the tame husbands of his time are laughed at on the stage, and that the successful gallants triumph, which was without precedent either in the city or the court. He does not think it enough that the stage "shows vice its own image, scorn its own feature," unless they are damned at the same instant, and carried off (like Don Juan) by real devils to the infernal regions, before the faces of the spectators. It seems that the author would have been contented to be present at a comedy or a farce, like a Father Inquisitor, if there was to be an *auto da fé* at the end, to burn both the actors and the poet. This sour, nonjuring critic has a great horror and repugnance at poor human nature, in nearly all its shapes; of the existence of which he appears only to be aware through the stage: and this he considers as the only exception to the practice of piety, and the performance of the whole

duty of man; and seems fully convinced, that if this nuisance were abated, the whole world would be regulated according to the creed and the catechism. This is a strange blindness and infatuation! He forgets, in his overheated zeal, two things: First, That the stage must be copied from real life, that the manners represented there must exist elsewhere, and "denote a foregone conclusion," to satisfy common sense. Secondly, That the stage cannot shock common decency, according to the notions that prevail of it in any age or country, because the exhibition is public. If the pulpit, for instance, had banished all vice and imperfection from the world, as our critic would suppose, we should not have seen the offensive reflection of them on the stage, which he resents as an affront to the cloth, and an outrage on religion. On the contrary, with such a sweeping reformation as this theory implies, the office of the preacher, as well as of the player, would be gone; and if the common peccadilloes of lying, swearing, intriguing, fighting, drinking, gaming, and other such obnoxious dramatic common-places, were once fairly got rid of in reality, neither the comic poet would be able to laugh at them on the stage, nor our good-natured author to consign them over to damnation elsewhere. The work is, however, written with ability, and did much mischief: it produced those *do-me-good*, lack-a-daisical, whining, make-believe comedies in the next age (such as Steele's 'Conscious Lovers,' and others), which are enough to set one to sleep, and where the author tries in vain to be merry and wise in the same breath; in which the utmost stretch of licentiousness goes no farther than the gallant's being suspected of keeping a mistress, and the highest proof of courage is given in his refusing to accept a challenge.

In looking into the old editions of the comedies of the last age, I find the names of the best actors of those times, of whom scarcely any record is left but in Colley Cibber's

Life, and the monument to Mrs. Oldfield in Westminster Abbey; which Voltaire reckons among the proofs of the liberality, wisdom, and politeness of the English nation:—

> "Let no rude hand deface it,
> And its forlorn *hic jacet.*"

Authors, after their deaths, live in their works; players only in their epitaphs and the breath of common tradition. They "die and leave the world no copy." Their uncertain popularity is as short-lived as it is dazzling; and in a few years nothing is known of them but that *they were.*

LECTURE V.

ON THE PERIODICAL ESSAYISTS.

"The proper study of mankind is man."

I NOW come to speak of that sort of writing which has been so successfully cultivated in this country by our periodical Essayists, and which consists in applying the talents and resources of the mind to all that mixed mass of human affairs, which, though not included under the head of any regular art, science, or profession, falls under the cognizance of the writer, and "comes home to the business and bosoms of men."

Quicquid agunt homines nostri farrago libelli,

is the general motto of this department of literature. It does not treat of minerals or fossils, of the virtues of plants, or the influence of planets; it does not meddle with forms of belief or systems of philosophy, nor launch into the world of spiritual existences; but it makes familiar with the world of men and women, records their actions, assigns their motives, exhibits their whims, characterises their pursuits in all their singular and endless variety, ridicules their absurdities, exposes their inconsistencies, "holds the mirror up to nature, and shows the very age and body of the time, its form and pressure;" takes minutes of our dress, air, looks, words, thoughts, and actions; shows us what we are, and what we are not; plays the whole game of human life over before us, and by making us enlightened spectators of its many-coloured scenes, enables us (if possible) to become tolerably reason-

able agents in the one in which we have to perform a part. "The act and practic part of life is thus made the mistress of our theorique." It is the best and most natural course of study. It is in morals and manners what the experimental is in natural philosophy, as opposed to the dogmatical method. It does not deal in sweeping clauses of proscription and anathema, but in nice distinctions and liberal constructions. It makes up its general accounts from details, its few theories from many facts. It does not try to prove all black or all white as it wishes, but lays on the intermediate colours (and most of them not unpleasing ones), as it finds them blended with "the web of our life, which is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together." It inquires what human life is and has been, to show what it ought to be. It follows it into courts and camps, into town and country, into rustic sports or learned disputations, into the various shades of prejudice or ignorance, of refinement or barbarism, into its private haunts or public pageants, into its weaknesses and littlenesses, its professions and its practices: before it pretends to distinguish right from wrong, or one thing from another. How, indeed, should it do so otherwise?

> "Quid sit pulchrum, quid turpe, quid utile, quid non,
> Plenius et melius Chrysippo et Crantore dicit."

The writers I speak of are, if not moral philosophers, moral historians, and that's better: or if they are both, they found the one character upon the other; their premises precede their conclusions; and we put faith in their testimony, for we know that it is true.

Montaigne was the first person who in his 'Essays' led the way to this kind of writing among the moderns. The great merit of Montaigne, then, was that he may be said to have been the first who had the courage to say as an author what he felt as a man. And as courage is generally the effect of conscious strength, he was probably led to do so by the richness, truth and force of his own

observations on books and men. He was, in the truest sense, a man of original mind; that is, he had the power of looking at things for himself, or as they really were, instead of blindly trusting to, and fondly repeating what others told him that they were. He got rid of the go-cart of prejudice and affectation, with the learned lumber that follows at their heels, because he could do without them. In taking up his pen he did not set up for a philosopher, wit, orator, or moralist, but he became all these by merely daring to tell us whatever passed through his mind, in its naked simplicity and force, that he thought anyways worth communicating. He did not, in the abstract character of an author, undertake to say all that could be said upon a subject, but what in his capacity as an inquirer after truth he happened to know about it. He was neither a pedant nor a bigot. He neither supposed that he was bound to know all things, nor that all things were bound to conform to what he had fancied or would have them to be. In treating of men and manners, he spoke of them as he found them, not according to preconceived notions and abstract dogmas; and he began by teaching us what he himself was. In criticising books he did not compare them with rules and systems, but told us what he saw to like or dislike in them. He did not take his standard of excellence "according to an exact scale" of Aristotle, or fall out with a work that was good for anything, because "not one of the angles at the four corners was a right one." He was, in a word, the first author who was not a bookmaker, and who wrote not to make converts of others to established creeds and prejudices, but to satisfy his own mind of the truth of things. In this respect we know not which to be most charmed with, the author or the man. There is an inexpressible frankness and sincerity, as well as power, in what he writes. There is no attempt at imposition or concealment, no juggling tricks or solemn mouthing, no laboured at-

tempts at proving himself always in the right, and everybody else in the wrong; he says what is uppermost, lays open what floats at the top or the bottom of his mind, and deserves Pope's character of him, where he professes to

> "——— pour out all as plain
> As downright Shippen, or as old Montaigne."*

He does not converse with us like a pedagogue with his pupil, whom he wishes to make as great a blockhead as himself, but like a philosopher and friend who has passed through life with thought and observation, and is willing to enable others to pass through it with pleasure and profit. A writer of this stamp, I confess, appears to me as much superior to a common bookworm, as a library of real books is superior to a mere bookcase, painted and lettered on the outside with the names of celebrated works. As he was the first to attempt this new way of writing, so the same strong natural impulse which prompted the undertaking, carried him to the end of his career. The same force and honesty of mind which urged him to throw off the shackles of custom and prejudice, would enable him to complete his triumph over them. He has left little for his successors to achieve in the way of just and original speculation on human life. Nearly all the thinking of the two last centuries of that kind which the French denominate *morale observatrice*, is to be found in Montaigne's 'Essays:' there is the germ, at least, and generally much more. He sowed the seed and cleared away the rubbish, even where others have reaped the fruit, or cultivated and decorated the soil to a greater degree of nicety and perfection. There is no one to whom the old Latin adage is more applicable than to Montaigne, "*Pereant isti qui ante nos nostra dixerunt.*" There has been no new impulse given to thought since his time. Among the specimens of criticisms on authors which he has left us, are those on

* Why Pope should say in reference to him, "Or *more wise* Charron," is not easy to determine.

Virgil, Ovid, and Boccaccio, in the account of books which he thinks worth reading, or (which is the same thing) which he finds he can read in his old age, and which may be reckoned among the few criticisms which are worth reading at any age.*

Montaigne's 'Essays' were translated into English by Charles Cotton, who was one of the wits and poets of the age of Charles II.; and Lord Halifax, one of the noble critics of that day, declared it to be "the book in the world he was the best pleased with." This mode of familiar essay-writing, free from the trammels of the schools, and the airs of professed authorship, was success-

* As an instance of his general power of reasoning, I shall give his chapter entitled 'One Man's Profit is another's Loss,' in which he has nearly anticipated Mandeville's celebrated paradox of private vices being public benefits:—

"Demades, the Athenian, condemned a fellow-citizen, who furnished out funerals, for demanding too great a price for his goods: and if he got an estate, it must be by the death of a great many people: but I think it a sentence ill-grounded, forasmuch as no profit can be made but at the expense of some other person, and that every kind of gain is by that rule liable to be condemned. The tradesman thrives by the debauchery of youth, and the farmer by the dearness of corn; the architect by the ruin of buildings; the officers of justice by quarrels and law-suits; nay, even the honour and function of divines is owing to our mortality and vices. No physician takes pleasure in the health even of his best friends, said the ancient Greek comedian, nor soldier in the peace of his country; and so of the rest. And, what is yet worse, let every one but examine his own heart, and he will find that his private wishes spring and grow up at the expense of some other person. Upon which consideration this thought came into my head, that nature does not hereby deviate from her general policy; for the naturalists hold, that the birth, nourishment, and increase of any one thing is the decay and corruption of another:

"*Nam quodcunque suis mutatum finibus exit,*
Continuo hoc mors est illius, quod fuit ante. i. e.

For what from its own confines chang'd doth pass,
Is straight the death of what before it was."

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fully imitated, about the same time, by Cowley and Sir William Temple, in their miscellaneous 'Essays,' which are very agreeable and learned talking upon paper. Lord Shaftesbury, on the contrary, who aimed at the same easy, *degagé* mode of communicating his thoughts to the world, has quite spoiled his matter, which is sometimes valuable, by his manner, in which he carries a certain flaunting, flowery, figurative, flirting style of amicable condescension to the reader, to an excess more tantalising than the most starched and ridiculous formality of the age of James I. There is nothing so tormenting as the affectation of ease and freedom from affectation.

The ice being thus thawed, and the barrier that kept authors at a distance from common sense and feeling broken through, the transition was not difficult from Montaigne and his imitators to our Periodical Essayists. These last applied the same unrestrained expression of their thoughts to the more immediate and passing scenes of life, to temporary and local matters; and in order to discharge the invidious office of *Censor Morum* more freely, and with less responsibility, assumed some fictitious and humorous disguise, which, however, in a great degree corresponded to their own peculiar habits and character. By thus concealing their own name and person under the title of the 'Tatler,' 'Spectator,' &c., they were enabled to inform us more fully of what was passing in the world, while the dramatic contrast and ironical point of view to which the whole is subjected, added a greater liveliness and *piquancy* to the descriptions. The philosopher and wit here commences newsmonger, makes himself master of "the perfect spy o' th' time," and from his various walks and turns through life, brings home little curious specimens of the humours, opinions, and manners of his contemporaries, as the botanist brings home different plants and weeds, or the mineralogist different shells and fossils, to illustrate their several theories, and be useful to mankind.

The first of these papers that was attempted in this country was set up by Steele in the beginning of the last century; and of all our Periodical Essayists, the *Tatler* (for that was the name he assumed) has always appeared to me the most amusing and agreeable. Montaigne, whom I have proposed to consider as the father of this kind of personal authorship among the moderns, in which the reader is admitted behind the curtain, and sits down with the writer in his gown and slippers, was a most magnanimous and undisguised egotist; but Isaac Bickerstaff, Esq., was the more disinterested gossip of the two. The French author is contented to describe the peculiarities of his own mind and constitution, which he does with a copious and unsparing hand. The English journalist good-naturedly lets you into the secret both of his own affairs and those of others. A young lady, on the other side Temple Bar, cannot be seen at her glass for half a day together, but Mr. Bickerstaff takes due notice of it; and he has the first intelligence of the symptoms of the *belle* passion appearing in any young gentleman at the West-end of the town. The departures and arrivals of widows with handsome jointures, either to bury their grief in the country, or to procure a second husband in town, are punctually recorded in his pages. He is well acquainted with the celebrated beauties of the preceding age at the court of Charles II.; and the old gentleman (as he feigns himself) often grows romantic in recounting "the disastrous strokes which his youth suffered" from the glances of their bright eyes, and their unaccountable caprices. In particular, he dwells with a secret satisfaction on the recollection of one of his mistresses, who left him for a richer rival, and whose constant reproach to her husband, on occasion of any quarrel between them, was, "I, that might have married the famous Mr. Bickerstaff, to be treated in this manner!" The club at the Trumpet consists of a set of persons almost as well worth knowing

as himself. The cavalcade of the justice of the peace, the knight of the shire, the country squire, and the young gentleman, his nephew, who came to wait on him at his chambers, in such form and ceremony, seem not to have settled the order of their precedence to this hour;* and I should hope that the upholsterer and his companions, who used to sun themselves in the Green Park, and who broke their rest and fortunes to maintain the balance of power in Europe, stand as fair a chance for immortality as some modern politicians. Mr. Bickerstaff himself is a gentleman and a scholar, a humorist, and a man of the world; with a great deal of nice easy *naïveté* about him. If he walks out and is caught in a shower of rain, he makes amends for this unlucky accident by a criticism on the shower in 'Virgil,' and concludes with a burlesque copy of verses on a city shower. He entertains us, when he dates from his own apartments, with a quotation from Plutarch, or a moral reflection: from the Grecian coffee-house, with politics; and from Will's or the Temple, with the poets and players, the beaux and men of wit and pleasure about town. In reading the pages of the 'Tatler,' we seem as if suddenly carried back to the age of Queen Anne, of toupees and full-bottomed periwigs. The whole appearance of our dress and manners undergoes a delightful metamorphosis. The beaux and the belles are of a quite different species from what they are at present; we distinguish the dappers, the smarts, and the pretty fellows, as they pass by Mr. Lilly's shop-windows in the Strand; we are introduced to Betterton and Mrs. Oldfield behind the scenes; are made familiar with the persons and performances of Will Estcourt or Tom Durfey; we listen to a dispute at a tavern on the merits of the Duke of Marlborough or Marshal Turenne; or are present at the first rehearsal of a play by Vanbrugh, or the reading of a new poem by Mr. Pope. The privilege of thus virtually

* No. 125.

transporting ourselves to past times is even greater than that of visiting distant places in reality. London, a hundred years ago, would be much better worth seeing than Paris at the present moment.

It will be said, that all this is to be found, in the same or a greater degree, in the 'Spectator.' For myself, I do not think so; or at least, there is in the last work a much greater proportion of commonplace matter. I have, on this account, always preferred the 'Tatler' to the 'Spectator.' Whether it is owing to my having been earlier or better acquainted with the one than the other, my pleasure in reading these two admirable works is not in proportion to their comparative reputation. The 'Tatler' contains only half the number of volumes, and, I will venture to say, nearly an equal quantity of sterling wit and sense. "The first sprightly runnings" are there: it has more of the original spirit, more of the freshness and stamp of nature. The indications of character and strokes of humour are more true and frequent; the reflections that suggest themselves arise more from the occasion, and are less spun out into regular dissertations. They are more like the remarks which occur in sensible conversation, and less like a lecture. Something is left to the understanding of the reader. Steele seems to have gone into his closet chiefly to set down what he observed out of doors. Addison seems to have spent most of his time in his study, and to have spun out and wire-drawn the hints, which he borrowed from Steele, or took from nature, to the utmost. I am far from wishing to depreciate Addison's talents, but I am anxious to do justice to Steele, who was, I think, upon the whole a less artificial and more original writer. The humorous descriptions of Steele resemble loose sketches, or fragments of a comedy; those of Addison are rather comments or ingenious paraphrases on the genuine text. The characters of the club, not only in the 'Tatler,' but in the 'Spectator,' were drawn by Steele.

That of Sir Roger de Coverley is among the number. Addison has, however, gained himself immortal honour by his manner of filling up this last character. Who is there that can forget, or be insensible to, the inimitable nameless graces and varied traits of nature and of old English character in it: to his unpretending virtues and amiable weaknesses: to his modesty, generosity, hospitality, and eccentric whims: to the respect of his neighbours, and the affection of his domestics: to his wayward, hopeless, secret passion for his fair enemy, the widow, in which there is more of real romance and true delicacy than in a thousand tales of knight-errantry (we perceive the hectic flush of his cheek, the faltering of his tongue in speaking of her bewitching airs and "the whiteness of her hand"): to the havoc he makes among the game in his neighbourhood: to his speech from the bench, to show the Spectator what is thought of him in the country: to his unwillingness to be put up as a sign-post, and his having his own likeness turned into the Saracen's head: to his gentle reproof of the baggage of a gipsy that tells him "he has a widow in his line of life:" to his doubts as to the existence of witchcraft, and protection of reputed witches: to his account of the family pictures, and his choice of a chaplain: to his falling asleep at church, and his reproof of John Williams, as soon as he recovered from his nap, for talking in sermon-time. The characters of Will Wimble and Will Honeycomb are not a whit behind their friend, Sir Roger, in delicacy and felicity. The delightful simplicity and good-humoured officiousness in the one are set off by the graceful affectation and courtly pretension in the other. How long since I first became acquainted with these two characters in the 'Spectator!' What old-fashioned friends they seem, and yet I am not tired of them like so many other friends, nor they of me! How airy these abstractions of the poet's pen stream over the dawn of our acquaintance with human

life! how they glance their fairest colours on the prospect before us! how pure they remain in it to the last, like the rainbow in the evening-cloud, which the rude hand of time and experience can neither soil nor dissipate! What a pity that we cannot find the reality, and yet if we did, the dream would be over. I once thought I knew a Will Wimble,* and a Will Honeycomb,† but they turned out but indifferently; the originals in the 'Spectator' still read, word for word, the same that they always did. We have only to turn to the page, and find them where we left them! Many of the most exquisite pieces in the 'Tatler,' it is to be observed, are Addison's, as the 'Court of Honour' and the 'Personification of Musical Instruments,' with almost all those papers that form regular sets or series. I do not know whether the picture of the family of an old college acquaintance, in the 'Tatler,' where the children run to let Mr. Bickerstaff in at the door, and where the one that loses the race that way, turns back to tell the father that he is come: with the nice gradation of incredulity in the little boy who is got into 'Guy of Warwick' and the 'Seven Champions,' and who shakes his head at the improbability of 'Æsop's Fables,' is Steele's or Addison's, though I believe it belongs to the former. The account of the two sisters, one of whom held up her head higher than ordinary, from having on a pair of flowered garters, and that of the married lady who complained to the 'Tatler' of the neglect of her husband, with her answers to some *home* questions that were put to her, are unquestionably Steele's. If the 'Tatler' is not inferior to the 'Spectator' as a record of manners and character, it is superior to it in the interest

* See Wheeler's 'Dictionary of the Noted Names of Fiction,' 1866, art. WIMBLE.—ED.

† Honeycomb was also one of the names introduced into the 'Spectator,' and was at a later period adopted by Leigh Hunt, to whom the writer here alludes.—ED.

of many of the stories. Several of the incidents related there by Steele have never been surpassed in the heart-rending pathos of private distress. I might refer to those of the lover and his mistress, when the theatre, in which they were, caught fire; of the bridegroom, who by accident kills his bride on the day of their marriage; the story of Mr. Eustace and his wife; and the fine dream about his own mistress when a youth. What has given its superior reputation to the 'Spectator,' is the greater gravity of its pretensions, its moral dissertations and critical reasonings, by which I confess myself less edified than by other things, which are thought more lightly of. Systems and opinions change, but nature is always true. It is the moral and didactic tone of the 'Spectator' which makes us apt to think of Addison (according to Mandeville's sarcasm) as "a parson in a tie-wig." Many of his moral Essays are, however, exquisitely beautiful and quite happy. Such are the reflections on cheerfulness, those in Westminster Abbey, on the Royal Exchange, and particularly some very affecting ones on the death of a young lady in the fourth volume. These, it must be allowed, are the perfection of elegant sermonizing. His critical Essays are not so good. I prefer Steele's occasional selection of beautiful poetical passages, without any affectation of analysing their beauties, to Addison's finer-spun theories. The best criticism in the 'Spectator,' that on the 'Cartoons of Raphael,' of which Mr. Fuseli has availed himself with great spirit in his 'Lectures,' is by Steele.* I owed this acknowledgment to a writer who has so often put me in good humour with myself, and everything about me, when few things else could, and when the tomes of casuistry and ecclesiastical history, with which the little duodecimo

* The antithetical style and verbal paradoxes which Burke was so fond of, in which the epithet is a seeming contradiction to the substantive, such as "proud submission and dignified obedience," are, I think, first to be found in the 'Tatler.'

volumes of the 'Tatler' were overwhelmed and surrounded, in the only library to which I had access when a boy,* had tried their tranquillising effects upon me in vain. I had not long ago in my hands, by favour of a friend, an original copy of the quarto † edition of the 'Tatler,' with a list of the subscribers. It is curious to see some names there which we should hardly think of (that of Sir Isaac Newton is among them), and also to observe the degree of interest excited by those of the different persons, which is not determined according to the rules of the Heralds' College. One literary name lasts as long as a whole race of heroes and their descendants! The 'Guardian,' which followed the 'Spectator,' was, as may be supposed, inferior to it.

The dramatic and conversational turn which forms the distinguishing feature and greatest charm of the 'Spectator' and 'Tatler,' is quite lost in the 'Rambler' by Dr. Johnson. There is no reflected light thrown on human life from an assumed character, nor any direct one from a display of the author's own. The 'Tatler' and 'Spectator' are, as it were, made up of notes and memorandums of the events and incidents of the day, with finished studies after nature, and characters fresh from the life, which the writer moralises upon, and turns to account as they come before him: the 'Rambler' is a collection of moral Essays, or scholastic theses, written on set subjects, and of which the individual characters and incidents are merely artificial illustrations, brought in to give a pretended relief to the dryness of didactic discussion. The 'Rambler' is a splendid and imposing common-place book of general topics, and rhetorical declamation on the conduct and business of human life. In this sense, there is hardly a reflection that had been suggested on such subjects which is not to be found in this celebrated work, and there

* Probably his father's. See 'Memoirs of William Hazlitt,' 1867, i. 33.—Ed.

† Folio, not quarto.—Ed.

is, perhaps, hardly a reflection to be found in it which had not been already suggested and developed by some other author, or in the common course of conversation. The mass of intellectual wealth here heaped together is immense; but it is rather the result of gradual accumulation, the produce of the general intellect labouring in the mine of knowledge and reflection, than dug out of the quarry, and dragged into the light by the industry and sagacity of a single mind. I am not here saying that Dr. Johnson was a man without originality, compared with the ordinary run of men's minds; but he was not a man of original thought or genius, in the sense in which Montaigne or Lord Bacon was. He opened no new vein of precious ore, nor did he light upon any single pebbles of uncommon size and unrivalled lustre. We seldom meet with anything to "give us pause;" he does not set us thinking for the first time. His reflections present themselves like reminiscences; do not disturb the ordinary march of our thoughts; arrest our attention by the stateliness of their appearance and the costliness of their garb, but pass on and mingle with the throng of our impressions. After closing the volumes of the 'Rambler,' there is nothing that we remember as a new truth gained to the mind, nothing indelibly stamped upon the memory; nor is there any passage that we wish to turn to as embodying any known principle or observation with such force and beauty that justice can only be done to the idea in the author's own words. Such, for instance, are many of the passages to be found in Burke, which shine by their own light, belong to no class, have neither equal nor counterpart, and of which we say that no one but the author could have written them! There is neither the same boldness of design, nor mastery of execution in Johnson. In the one, the spark of genius seems to have met with its congenial matter: the shaft is sped; the forked lightning dresses up the face of nature in ghastly smiles, and the

loud thunder rolls far away from the ruin that is made. Dr. Johnson's style, on the contrary, resembles rather the rumbling of mimic thunder at one of our theatres; and the light he throws upon a subject is like the dazzling effect of phosphorus, or an *ignis fatuus* of words. There is a wide difference, however, between perfect originality and perfect common-place: neither ideas nor expressions are trite or vulgar because they are not quite new. They are valuable, and ought to be repeated, if they have not become quite common; and Johnson's style both of reasoning and imagery holds the middle rank between startling novelty and vapid common-place. Johnson has as much originality of thinking as Addison; but then he wants his familiarity of illustration, knowledge of character, and delightful humour. What most distinguishes Dr. Johnson from other writers is the pomp and uniformity of his style. All his periods are cast in the same mould, are of the same size and shape, and consequently have little fitness to the variety of things he professes to treat of. His subjects are familiar, but the author is always upon stilts. He has neither ease nor simplicity, and his efforts at playfulness, in part, remind one of the lines in Milton:—

> "——— The elephant
> To make them sport wreath'd his proboscis lithe."

His 'Letters from Correspondents,' in particular, are more pompous and unwieldy than what he writes in his own person. This want of relaxation and variety of manner has, I think, after the first effects of novelty and surprise were over, been prejudicial to the matter. It takes from the general power not only to please, but to instruct. The monotony of style produces an apparent monotony of ideas. What is really striking and valuable, is lost in the vain ostentation and circumlocution of the expression; for when we find the same pains and pomp of diction

bestowed upon the most trifling as upon the most important parts of a sentence or discourse, we grow tired of distinguishing between pretension and reality, and are disposed to confound the tinsel and bombast of the phraseology with want of weight in the thoughts. Thus, from the imposing and oracular nature of the style, people are tempted at first to imagine that our author's speculations are all wisdom and profundity: till having found out their mistake in some instances, they suppose that there is nothing but commonplace in them, concealed under verbiage and pedantry; and in both they are wrong. The fault of Dr. Johnson's style is, that it reduces all things to the same artificial and unmeaning level. It destroys all shades of difference, the association between words and things. It is a perpetual paradox and innovation. He condescends to the familiar till we are ashamed of our interest in it: he expands the little till it looks big. "If he were to write a fable of little fishes," as Goldsmith said of him, "he would make them speak like great whales." We can no more distinguish the most familiar objects in his description of them, than we can a well-known face under a huge painted mask. The structure of his sentences, which was his own invention, and which has been generally imitated since his time, is a species of rhyming in prose, where one clause answers to another in measure and quantity, like the tagging of syllables at the end of a verse; the close of the period follows as mechanically as the oscillation of a pendulum, the sense is balanced with the sound; each sentence, revolving round its centre of gravity, is contained with itself like a couplet, and each paragraph forms itself into a stanza. Dr. Johnson is also a complete balance-master in the topics of morality. He never encourages hope, but he counteracts it by fear; he never elicits a truth, but he suggests some objection in answer to it. He seizes and alternately quits the clue of reason, lest it should involve

him in the labyrinths of endless error: he wants confidence in himself and his fellows. He dares not trust himself with the immediate impressions of things, for fear of compromising his dignity; or follow them into their consequences, for fear of committing his prejudices. His timidity is the result, not of ignorance, but of morbid apprehension. "He runs the great circle, and is still at home." No advance is made by his writings in any sentiment, or mode of reasoning. Out of the pale of established authority and received dogmas, all is sceptical, loose, and desultory: he seems in imagination to strengthen the dominion of prejudice, as he weakens and dissipates that of reason; and round the rock of faith and power, on the edge of which he slumbers blindfold and uneasy, the waves and billows of uncertain and dangerous opinion roar and heave for evermore. His 'Rasselas' is the most melancholy and debilitating moral speculation that ever was put forth. Doubtful of the faculties of his mind, as of his organs of vision, Johnson trusted only to his feelings and his fears. He cultivated a belief in witches as an out-guard to the evidences of religion; and abused Milton, and patronised Lauder, in spite of his aversion to his countrymen, as a step to secure the existing establishment in church and state. This was neither right feeling nor sound logic.

The most triumphant record of the talents and character of Johnson is to be found in Boswell's Life of him. The man was superior to the author. When he threw aside his pen, which he regarded as an incumbrance, he became not only learned and thoughtful, but acute, witty, humorous, natural, honest; hearty and determined, "the king of good fellows and wale of old men." There are as many smart repartees, profound remarks, and keen invectives to be found in Boswell's "inventory of all he said," as are recorded of any celebrated man. The life and dramatic play of his conversation forms a contrast to his

written works. His natural powers and undisguised opinions were called out in convivial intercourse. In public, he practised with the foils on: in private, he unsheathed the sword of controversy, and it was "the Ebro's temper." The eagerness of opposition roused him from his natural sluggishness and acquired timidity; he returned blow for blow; and whether the trial were of argument or wit, none of his rivals could boast much of the encounter. Burke seems to have been the only person who had a chance with him; and it is the unpardonable sin of Boswell's work, that he has purposely omitted their combats of strength and skill. Goldsmith asked, "Does he wind into a subject like a serpent, as Burke does?" And when exhausted with sickness, he himself said, "If that fellow Burke were here now, he would kill me." It is to be observed, that Johnson's colloquial style was as blunt, direct, and downright, as his style of studied composition was involved and circuitous. As when Topham Beauclerc and Langton knocked him up at his chambers, at three in the morning, and he came to the door with the poker in his hand, but seeing them, exclaimed, "What, is it you, my lads? then I'll have a frisk with you!" And he afterwards reproaches Langton, who was a literary milksop, for leaving them to go to an engagement "with some *un-ideal* girls." What words to come from the mouth of the great moralist and lexicographer! His good deeds were as many as his good sayings. His domestic habits, his tenderness to servants, and readiness to oblige his friends; the quantity of strong tea that he drank to keep down sad thoughts; his many labours reluctantly begun and irresolutely laid aside; his honest acknowledgment of his own, and indulgence to the weaknesses of others; his throwing himself back in the post-chaise with Boswell, and saying, "Now I think I am a good-humoured fellow," though nobody thought him so, and yet he was; his quitting the society of Garrick and his actresses, and his

reason for it; his dining with Wilkes, and his kindness to Goldsmith; his sitting with the young ladies on his knee at the Mitre, to give them good advice, in which situation, if not explained, he might be taken for Falstaff; and last and noblest, his carrying the unfortunate victim of disease and dissipation on his back up through Fleet Street (an act which realises the parable of the good Samaritan)*—all these, and innumerable others, endear him to the reader, and must be remembered to his lasting honour. He had faults, but they lie buried with him. He had his prejudices and his intolerant feelings; but he suffered enough in the conflict of his own mind with them. For if no man can be happy in the free exercise of his reason, no wise man can be happy without it. His were not time-serving, heartless, hypocritical prejudices; but deep, inwoven, not to be rooted out but with life and hope, which he found from old habit necessary to his own peace of mind, and thought so to the peace of mankind. I do not hate, but love him for them. They were between himself and his conscience; and should be left to that higher tribunal, "where they in trembling hope repose, the bosom of his Father and his God." In a word, he has left behind him few wiser or better men.

The herd of his imitators showed what he was by their disproportionate effects. The Periodical Essayists that succeeded the 'Rambler' are, and deserve to be, little read at present. The 'Adventurer,' by Hawksworth, is completely trite and vapid, aping all the faults of Johnson's style, without anything to atone for them. The sentences are often absolutely unmeaning; and one half of each might regularly be left blank. The 'World,' and 'Connoisseur,' which followed, are a little better; and in the last of these there is one good idea, that of a man in indifferent health, who judges of every one's title to respect from their possession of this blessing, and bows to

* See 'Memoirs of William Hazlitt,' 1867, i., 238.—Ed.

a sturdy beggar with sound limbs and a florid complexion, while he turns his back upon a lord who is a valetudinarian.

Goldsmith's 'Citizen of the World,' like all his works, bears the stamp of the author's mind. It does not "go about to cozen reputation without the stamp of merit." He is more observing, more original, more natural and picturesque than Johnson. His work is written on the model of the 'Persian Letters;' and contrives to give an abstracted and somewhat perplexing view of things, by opposing foreign prepossessions to our own, and thus stripping objects of their customary disguises. Whether truth is elicited in this collision of contrary absurdities, I do not know; but I confess the process is too ambiguous and full of intricacy to be very amusing to my plain understanding. For light summer reading, it is like walking in a garden full of traps and pitfalls. It necessarily gives rise to paradoxes, and there are some very bold ones in the Essays, which would subject an author less established to no very agreeable sort of *censura literaria.* Thus the Chinese philosopher exclaims very unadvisedly, "The bonzes and priests of all religions keep up superstition and imposture: all reformations begin with the laity." Goldsmith, however, was staunch in his practical creed, and might bolt speculative extravagances with impunity. There is a striking difference in this respect between him and Addison who, if he attacked authority, took care to have common sense on his side, and never hazarded anything offensive to the feelings of others, or on the strength of his own discretional opinion. There is another inconvenience in this assumption of an exotic character and tone of sentiment, that it produces an inconsistency between the knowledge which the individual has time to acquire, and which the author is bound to communicate. Thus the Chinese has not been in England three days before he is acquainted with the characters of the three countries which compose this kingdom, and

describes them to his friend at Canton, by extracts from the newspapers of each metropolis. The nationality of Scotchmen is thus ridiculed:—"*Edinburgh.* We are positive when we say that Sanders Macgregor, lately executed for horse-stealing, is not a native of Scotland, but born at Carrickfergus." Now this is very good; but how should our Chinese philosopher find it out by instinct? Beau Tibbs, a prominent character in this little work, is the best comic sketch since the time of Addison; unrivalled in his finery, his vanity, and his poverty.

I have only to mention the names of the 'Lounger' and the 'Mirror,' which are ranked by the author's admirers with Sterne for sentiment, and with Addison for humour. I shall not enter into that: but I know that the story of 'La Roche' is not like the story of 'Le Fevre,' nor one hundredth part so good. Do I say this from prejudice to the author? No: for I have read his novels. Of the 'Man of the World' I cannot think so favourably as some others; nor shall I here dwell on the picturesque and romantic beauties of Julia de Roubigné, the early favourite of the author of 'Rosamond Gray;' but of the 'Man of Feeling' I would speak with grateful recollections: nor is it possible to forget the sensitive, irresolute, interesting Harley; and that lone figure of Miss Walton in it, that floats in the horizon, dim and ethereal, the day-dream of her lover's youthful fancy—better, far better than all the realities of life!

LECTURE VI.

ON THE ENGLISH NOVELISTS.

THERE is an exclamation in one of Gray's Letters—"Be mine to read eternal new romances of Marivaux and Crebillon!" If I did not utter a similar aspiration at the conclusion of the last new novel which I read (I would not give offence by being more particular as to the name), it was not from any want of affection for the class of writing to which it belongs: for, without going so far as the celebrated French philosopher, who thought that more was to be learnt from good novels and romances than from the gravest treatises on history and morality, yet there are few works to which I am oftener tempted to turn for profit or delight, than to the standard productions in this species of composition. We find there a close imitation of men and manners; we see the very web and texture of society as it really exists, and as we meet with it when we come into the world. If poetry has "something more divine in it," this savours more of humanity. We are brought acquainted with the motives and characters of mankind, imbibe our notions of virtue and vice from practical examples, and are taught a knowledge of the world through the airy medium of romance. As a record of past manners and opinions, too, such writings afford the best and fullest information. For example, I should be at a loss where to find in any authentic documents of the same period so satisfactory an account of the general state of society, and of moral, political, and religious feeling in the reign of George II., as we meet with in the 'Adventures

of Joseph Andrews and his friend Mr. Abraham Adams.' This work, indeed, I take to be a perfect piece of statistics in its kind. In looking into any regular history of that period, into a learned and eloquent charge to a grand jury or the clergy of a diocese, or into a tract on controversial divinity, we should hear only of the ascendancy of the Protestant succession, the horrors of Popery, the triumph of civil and religious liberty, the wisdom and moderation of the sovereign, the happiness of the subject, and the flourishing state of manufactures and commerce. But if we really wish to know what all these fine-sounding names come to, we cannot do better than turn to the works of those who, having no other object than to imitate nature, could only hope for success from the fidelity of their pictures, and were bound (in self-defence) to reduce the boasts of vague theorists and the exaggerations of angry disputants to the mortifying standard of reality. Extremes are said to meet; and the works of imagination, as they are called, sometimes come the nearest to truth and nature. Fielding, in speaking on this subject and vindicating the use and dignity of the style of writing in which he excelled against the loftier pretensions of professed historians, says that in their productions nothing is true but the names and dates, whereas in his everything is true but the names and dates. If so, he has the advantage on his side.

I will here confess, however, that I am a little prejudiced on the point in question; and that the effect of many fine speculations has been lost upon me, from an early familiarity with the most striking passages in the work to which I have just alluded. Thus nothing can be more captivating than the description somewhere given by Mr. Burke of the indissoluble connection between learning and nobility, and of the respect universally paid by wealth to piety and morals. But the effect of this ideal representation has always been spoiled by my recollection

of Parson Adams sitting over his cup of ale in Sir Thomas Booby's kitchen. Echard 'On the Contempt of the Clergy' is, in like manner, a very good book, and "worthy of all acceptation:" but, somehow, an unlucky impression of the reality of Parson Trulliber involuntarily checks the emotions of respect to which it might otherwise give rise: while, on the other hand, the lecture which Lady Booby reads to Lawyer Scout on the immediate expulsion of Joseph and Fanny from the parish, casts no very favourable light on the flattering accounts of our practical jurisprudence which are to be found in 'Blackstone' or 'De Lolme.' The most moral writers, after all, are those who do not pretend to inculcate any moral. The professed moralist almost unavoidably degenerates into the partisan of a system; and the philosopher is too apt to warp the evidence to his own purpose. But the painter of manners gives the facts of human nature, and leaves us to draw the inference: if we are not able to do this, or do it ill, at least it is our own fault.

The first-rate writers in this class of course are few; but those few we may reckon among the greatest ornaments and best benefactors of our kind. There is a certain set of them who, as it were, take their rank by the side of reality, and are appealed to as evidence on all questions concerning human nature. The principal of these are Cervantes and Le Sage, who may be considered as having been naturalised among ourselves; and, of native English growth, Fielding, Smollett, Richardson, and Sterne.* As this is a department of criticism which deserves more attention than has been usually bestowed upon it, I shall here venture to recur (not from choice, but necessity) to what I have said upon it in a well-known periodical

* It is not to be forgotten that the author of 'Robinson Crusoe' was also an Englishman. His other works, such as the 'Life of Colonel Jack,' &c., are of the same cast, and leave an impression on the mind more like that of things than words.

publication; and endeavour to contribute my mite towards settling the standard of excellence, both as to degree and kind, in these several writers.

I shall begin with the history of the renowned Don Quixote de la Mancha, who presents something more stately, more romantic, and at the same time more real to the imagination than any other hero upon record. His lineaments, his accoutrements, his pasteboard vizor, are familiar to us; and Mambrino's helmet still glitters in the sun! We not only feel the greatest love and veneration for the knight himself, but a certain respect for all those connected with him, the curate and Master Nicolas the barber, Sancho and Dapple, and even for Rosinante's leanness and his errors. Perhaps there is no work which combines so much whimsical invention with such an air of truth. Its popularity is almost unequalled; and yet its merits have not been sufficiently understood. The story is the least part of them; though the blunders of Sancho, and the unlucky adventures of his master, are what naturally catch the attention of the majority of readers. The pathos and dignity of the sentiments are often disguised under the ludicrousness of the subject, and provoke laughter when they might well draw tears. The character of Don Quixote himself is one of the most perfect disinterestedness. He is an enthusiast of the most amiable kind: of a nature equally open, gentle, and generous: a lover of truth and justice; and one who had brooded over the fine dreams of chivalry and romance, till they had robbed him of himself, and cheated his brain into a belief of their reality. There cannot be a greater mistake than to consider 'Don Quixote' as a merely satirical work, or as a vulgar attempt to explode "the long-forgotten order of chivalry." There could be no need to explode what no longer existed. Besides, Cervantes himself was a man of the most sanguine and enthusiastic temperament; and even through the crazed and battered figure of the

knight, the spirit of chivalry shines out with undiminished lustre; as if the author had half designed to revive the example of past ages, and once more "witch the world with noble horsemanship." Oh! if ever the mouldering flame of Spanish liberty is destined to break forth, wrapping the tyrant and the tyranny in one consuming blaze, that the spark of generous sentiment and romantic enterprise, from which it must be kindled, has not been quite extinguished, will perhaps be owing to thee, Cervantes, and to thy 'Don Quixote!'

The character of Sancho is not more admirable in itself, than as a relief to that of the knight. The contrast is as picturesque and striking as that between the figures of Rosinante and Dapple. Never was there so complete a *partie quarrée*:—they answer to one another at all points. Nothing need surpass the truth of physiognomy in the description of the master and man, both as to body and mind; the one lean and tall, the other round and short; the one heroical and courteous, the other selfish and servile; the one full of high-flown fancies, the other a bag of proverbs; the one always starting some romantic scheme, the other trying to keep to the safe side of custom and tradition. The gradual ascendancy, however, obtained by Don Quixote over Sancho, is as finely managed as it is characteristic. Credulity and a love of the marvellous are as natural to ignorance, as selfishness and cunning. Sancho by degrees becomes a kind of lay-brother of the order; acquires a taste for adventures in his own way, and is made all but an entire convert, by the discovery of the hundred crowns in one of his most comfortless journeys. Towards the end, his regret at being forced to give up the pursuit of knight-errantry almost equals his master's; and he seizes the proposal of Don Quixote for them to turn shepherds with the greatest avidity—still applying it in his own fashion; for while the Don is ingeniously torturing the names of his humble acquaintance into

classical terminations, and contriving scenes of gallantry and song, Sancho exclaims, "Oh, what delicate wooden spoons shall I carve! what crumbs and cream shall I devour!"—forgetting, in his milk and fruits, the pullets and geese at Camacho's wedding.

This intuitive perception of the hidden analogies of things, or, as it may be called, this *instinct of the imagination*, is, perhaps, what stamps the character of genius on the productions of art more than any other circumstance: for it works unconsciously like nature, and receives its impressions from a kind of inspiration. There is as much of this indistinct keeping and involuntary unity of purpose in Cervantes, as in any author whatever. Something of the same unsettled, rambling humour extends itself to all the subordinate parts and characters of the work. Thus we find the curate confidentially informing Don Quixote, that if he could get the ear of the government, he has something of considerable importance to propose for the good of the state; and our adventurer afterwards (in the course of his peregrinations) meets with a young gentleman who is a candidate for poetical honours, with a mad lover, a forsaken damsel, a Mahometan lady converted to the Christian faith, &c.—all delineated with the same truth, wildness, and delicacy of fancy. The whole work breathes that air of romance, that aspiration after imaginary good, that indescribable longing after something more than we possess, that in all places and in all conditions of life,

> "——— still prompts the eternal sigh,
> For which we wish to live, or dare to die!"

The leading characters in 'Don Quixote' are strictly individuals; that is, they do not so much belong to, as form a class by themselves. In other words, the actions and manners of the chief *dramatis personæ* do not arise out of the actions and manners of those around them, or the situation of life in which they are placed, but out of the

peculiar dispositions of the persons themselves, operated upon by certain impulses of caprice and accident. Yet these impulses are so true to nature, and their operation so exactly described, that we not only recognize the fidelity of the representation, but recognize it with all the advantages of novelty superadded. They are in the best sense *originals*, namely, in the sense in which nature has her originals. They are unlike anything we have seen before —may be said to be purely ideal, and yet identify themselves more readily with our imagination, and are retained more strongly in memory, than perhaps any others: they are never lost in the crowd. One test of the truth of this ideal painting is the number of allusions which 'Don Quixote' has furnished to the whole of civilised Europe: that is to say, of appropriate cases and striking illustrations of the universal principles of our nature. The detached incidents and occasional descriptions of human life are more familiar and obvious; so that we have nearly the same insight here given us into the characters of innkeepers, barmaids, ostlers, and puppet-show men, that we have in Fielding. There is a much greater mixture, however, of the pathetic and sentimental with the quaint and humorous, than there ever is in Fielding. I might instance the story of the countryman whom Don Quixote and Sancho met in their doubtful search after Dulcinea, driving his mules to plough at break of day, and "singing the ancient ballad of Ronscevalles!" The episodes which are frequently introduced are excellent, but have, upon the whole, been overrated. They derive their interest from their connexion with the main story. We are so pleased with that, that we are disposed to receive pleasure from everything else. Compared, for instance, with the serious tales of Boccaccio, they are slight and somewhat superficial. That of Marcella the fair shepherdess is, I think, the best. I shall only add, that 'Don Quixote' was, at the time it was published, an entirely original work in

its kind, and that the author claims the highest honour which can belong to one, that of being the inventor of a new style of writing. I have never read his 'Galatea,' nor his 'Loves of Persiles and Sigismunda,' though I have often meant to do it, and I hope to do so yet. Perhaps there is a reason lurking at the bottom of this dilatoriness. I am quite sure the reading of these works could not make me think higher of the author of 'Don Quixote,' and it might, for a moment or two, make me think less.*

There is another Spanish novel, 'Gusman D'Alfarache,' nearly of the same age as 'Don Quixote,' and of great genius, though it can hardly be ranked as a novel or a work of imagination. It is a series of strange, unconnected adventures, rather drily told, but accompanied by the most severe and sarcastic commentary. The satire, the wit, the eloquence and reasoning, are of the most potent kind: but they are didactic rather than dramatic. They would suit a homily or a pasquinade as well [as] or better than a romance. Still there are in this extraordinary book occasional sketches of character and humorous descriptions, to which it would be difficult to produce anything superior. This work, which is hardly known in this country except by name, has the credit without any reason of being the original of 'Gil Blas.' There is one incident the same, that of the unsavoury ragout, which is served up for supper at the inn. In all other respects these two works are the very reverse of each other, both in their excellences and defects. 'Lazarillo de Tormes' has been more read than the 'Spanish Rogue,' and is a work more readable, on this account among others, that it is contained in a duodecimo instead of a folio volume. This, however, is long enough, considering that it treats of only one subject, that of eating, or rather the possibility of living without

* My friend Mr. Henry Huth pointed out to me that the Second Part of 'Don Quixote' was produced (or accelerated, at all events) by the publication of a very inferior sequel by another writer.—Ed.

eating. Famine is here framed into an art, and feasting is banished far hence. The hero's time and thoughts are taken up in a thousand shifts to procure a dinner; and that failing, in tampering with his stomach till supper time, when being forced to go supperless to bed, he comforts himself with the hopes of a breakfast the next morning, of which being again disappointed, he reserves his appetite for a luncheon, and then has to stave it off again by some meagre excuse or other till dinner; and so on, by a perpetual adjournment of this necessary process, through the four and twenty hours round. The quantity of food proper to keep body and soul together is reduced to a *minimum;* and the most uninviting morsels with which Lazarillo meets once a week as a God's-send, are pampered into the most sumptuous fare by a long course of inanition. The scene of this novel could be laid nowhere so properly as in Spain, that land of priestcraft and poverty, where hunger seems to be the ruling passion, and starving the order of the day.

'Gil Blas' has, next to 'Don Quixote,' been more generally read and admired than any other novel; and in one sense, deservedly so: for it is at the head of its class, though that class is very different from, and I should say inferior to the other. There is little individual character in 'Gil Blas.' The author is a describer of manners, and not of character. He does not take the elements of human nature, and work them up into new combinations (which is the excellence of 'Don Quixote'); nor trace the peculiar and shifting shades of folly and knavery as they are to be found in real life (like Fielding): but he takes off, as it were, the general, habitual impression which circumstances make on certain conditions of life, and moulds all his characters accordingly. All the persons whom he introduces carry about with them the badge of their profession; and you see little more of them than their costume. He describes men as belonging to distinct

classes in society; not as they are in themselves, or with the individual differences which are always to be discovered in nature. His hero, in particular, has no character but that of the successive circumstances in which he is placed. His priests are only described as priests: his valets, his players, his women, his courtiers and his sharpers, are all alike. Nothing can well exceed the monotony of the work in this respect, at the same time that nothing can exceed the truth and precision with which the general manners of these different characters are preserved, nor the felicity of the particular traits by which their common foibles are brought out. Thus the Archbishop of Granada will remain an everlasting memento of the weakness of human vanity; and the account of Gil Blas' legacy, of the uncertainty of human expectations. This novel is also deficient in the fable as well as in the characters. It is not a regularly constructed story, but a series of amusing adventures told with equal gaiety and good sense, and in the most graceful style imaginable.

It has been usual to class our own great novelists as imitators of one or other of these two writers. Fielding, no doubt, is more like 'Don Quixote' than 'Gil Blas;' Smollett is more like 'Gil Blas' than 'Don Quixote;' but there is not much resemblance in either case. Sterne's 'Tristram Shandy' is a more direct instance of imitation; Richardson can scarcely be called an imitator of any one; or if he is, it is of the sentimental refinement of Marivaux, or of the verbose gallantry of the writers of the seventeenth century.

There is very little to warrant the common idea that Fielding was an imitator of Cervantes, except his own declaration of such an intention in the title-page of 'Joseph Andrews,' the romantic turn of the character of Parson Adams (the only romantic character in his works), and the proverbial humour of Partridge, which is kept up only for a few pages. Fielding's novels are, in general,

thoroughly his own; and they are thoroughly English. What they are most remarkable for, is neither sentiment, nor imagination, nor wit, nor even humour, though there is an immense deal of this last quality: but profound knowledge of human nature, at least of English nature, and masterly pictures of the characters of men as he saw them existing. This quality distinguishes all his works, and is shown almost equally in all of them. As a painter of real life, he was equal to Hogarth: as a mere observer of human nature, he was little inferior to Shakspeare, though without any of the genius and poetical qualities of his mind. His humour is less rich and laughable than Smollett's; his wit as often misses as hits; he has none of the fine pathos of Richardson or Sterne; but he has brought together a greater variety of characters in common life, marked with more distinct peculiarities and without an atom of caricature than any other novel writer whatever. The extreme subtlety of observation on the springs of human conduct in ordinary characters, is only equalled by the ingenuity of contrivance in bringing those springs into play, in such a manner as to lay open their smallest irregularity. The detection is always complete, and made with the certainty and skill of a philosophical experiment, and the obviousness and familiarity of a casual observation. The truth of the imitation is indeed so great, that it has been argued that Fielding must have had his materials ready-made to his hands, and was merely a transcriber of local manners and individual habits. For this conjecture, however, there seems to be no foundation. His representations, it is true, are local and individual; but they are not the less profound and conclusive. The feeling of the general principles of human nature, operating in particular circumstances, is always intense, and uppermost in his mind; and he makes use of incident and situation only to bring out character.

It is scarcely necessary to give any illustrations. Tom

Jones is full of them. There is the account, for example, of the gratitude of the elder Blifil to his brother, for assisting him to obtain the fortune of Miss Bridget Alworthy by marriage; and of the gratitude of the poor in his neighbourhood to Alworthy himself, who had done so much good in the country that he had made every one in it his enemy. There is the account of the Latin dialogues between Partridge and his maid, of the assault made on him during one of these by Mrs. Partridge, and the severe bruises he patiently received on that occasion, after which the parish of Little Baddington rung with the story that the schoolmaster had killed his wife. There is the exquisite keeping in the character of Blifil, and the want of it in that of Jones. There is the gradation in the lovers of Molly Seagrim; the philosopher Square succeeding to Tom Jones, who again finds that he himself had succeeded to the accomplished Will Barnes, who had the first possession of her person, and had still possession of her heart, Jones being only the instrument of her vanity, as Square was of her interest. Then there is the discreet honesty of Black George, the learning of Thwackum and Square, and the profundity of Squire Western, who considered it as a physical impossibility that his daughter should fall in love with Tom Jones. We have also that gentleman's disputes with his sister, and the inimitable appeal of that lady to her niece.—"I was never so handsome as you, Sophy: yet I had something of you formerly. I was called the cruel Parthenissa. Kingdoms and states, as Tully Cicero says, undergo alteration, and so must the human form!" The adventure of the same lady with the highwayman, who robbed her of her jewels, while he complimented her beauty, ought not to be passed over, nor that of Sophia and her muff, nor the reserved coquetry of her cousin Fitzpatrick, nor the description of Lady Bellaston, nor the modest overtures of the pretty widow Hunt, nor the indiscreet

babblings of Mrs. Honour. The moral of this book has been objected to without much reason; but a more serious objection has been made to the want of refinement and elegance in two principal characters. We never feel this objection, indeed, while we are reading the book: but at other times, we have something like a lurking suspicion that Jones was but an awkward fellow, and Sophia a pretty simpleton. I do not know how to account for this effect, unless it is that Fielding's constantly assuring us of the beauty of his hero, and the good sense of his heroine, at last produces a distrust of both. The story of 'Tom Jones' is allowed to be unrivalled: and it is this circumstance, together with the vast variety of characters, that has given the 'History of a Foundling' so decided a preference over Fielding's other novels. The characters themselves, both in 'Amelia' and 'Joseph Andrews,' are quite equal to any of those in 'Tom Jones.' The account of Miss Matthews and Ensign Hibbert, in the former of these; the way in which that lady reconciles herself to the death of her father; the inflexible Colonel Bath; the insipid Mrs. James, the complaisant Colonel Trent, the demure, sly, intriguing, equivocal Mrs. Bennet, the lord who is her seducer, and who attempts afterwards to seduce Amelia by the same mechanical process of a concert-ticket, a book, and the disguise of a great-coat; his little, fat, short-nosed, red-faced, good-humoured accomplice, the keeper of the lodging-house who, having no pretensions to gallantry herself, has a disinterested delight in forwarding the intrigues and pleasures of others (to say nothing of honest Atkinson, the story of the miniature picture of Amelia, and the hashed mutton, which are in a different style), are master-pieces of description. The whole scene at the lodging-house, the masquerade, &c., in 'Amelia,' are equal in interest to the parallel scenes in 'Tom Jones,' and even more refined in the knowledge of character. For instance, Mrs. Bennet is superior to Mrs.

Fitzpatrick in her own way. The uncertainty in which the event of her interview with her former seducer is left, is admirable. Fielding was a master of what may be called the *double entendre* of character, and surprises you no less by what he leaves in the dark (hardly known to the persons themselves), than by the unexpected discoveries he makes of the real traits and circumstances in a character with which, till then, you find you were unacquainted. There is nothing at all heroic, however, in the usual style of his delineations. He does not draw lofty characters or strong passions; all his persons are of the ordinary stature as to intellect, and possess little elevation of fancy or energy of purpose. Perhaps, after all, Parson Adams is his finest character. It is equally true to nature, and more ideal than any of the others. Its unsuspecting simplicity makes it not only more amiable, but doubly amusing, by gratifying the sense of superior sagacity in the reader. Our laughing at him does not once lessen our respect for him. His declaring that he would willingly walk ten miles to fetch his sermon on vanity, merely to convince Wilson of his thorough contempt of this vice, and his consoling himself for the loss of his 'Æschylus' by suddenly recollecting that he could not read it if he had it, because it is dark, are among the finest touches of *naïveté*. The night-adventures at Lady Booby's with Beau Didapper and the amiable Slipslop are the most ludicrous; and that with the huntsman, who draws off the hounds from the poor Parson, because they would be spoiled by following *vermin*, the most profound. Fielding did not often repeat himself; but Dr. Harrison, in 'Amelia,' may be considered as a variation of the character of Adams: so also is Goldsmith's 'Vicar of Wakefield;' and the latter part of that work, which sets out so delightfully, an almost entire plagiarism from Wilson's account of himself, and Adams's domestic history.

Smollett's first novel, 'Roderick Random,' which is also his best, appeared about the same time as Fielding's 'Tom Jones;' and yet it has a much more modern air with it: but this may be accounted for from the circumstance that Smollett was quite a young man at the time, whereas Fielding's manner must have been formed long before. The style of 'Roderick Random' is more easy and flowing than that of 'Tom Jones;' the incidents follow one another more rapidly (though, it must be confessed, they never come in such a throng, or are brought out with the same dramatic effect); the humour is broader and as effectual; and there is very nearly, if not quite, an equal interest excited by the story. What then is it that gives the superiority to Fielding? It is the superior insight into the springs of human character, and the constant development of that character through every change of circumstance. Smollett's humour often arises from the situation of the persons, or the peculiarity of their external appearance, as from Roderick Random's carroty locks, which hung down over his shoulders like a pound of candles, or Strap's ignorance of London, and the blunders that follow from it. There is a tone of vulgarity about all his productions. The incidents frequently resemble detached anecdotes taken from a newspaper or magazine; and, like those in 'Gil Blas,' might happen to a hundred other characters. He exhibits the ridiculous accidents and reverses to which human life is liable, not "the stuff" of which it is composed. He seldom probes to the quick, or penetrates beyond the surface; and therefore he leaves no stings in the minds of his readers, and in this respect is far less interesting than Fielding. His novels always enliven, and never tire us: we take them up with pleasure, and lay them down without any strong feeling of regret. We look on and laugh, as spectators of a highly amusing scene, without closing in with the combatants, or being made parties in the event. We read

'Roderick Random' as an entertaining story; for the particular accidents and modes of life which it describes have ceased to exist: but we regard 'Tom Jones' as a real history, because the author never stops short of those essential principles which lie at the bottom of all our actions, and in which we feel an immediate interest—*intus et in cute.* Smollett excels most as the lively caricaturist, Fielding as the exact painter and profound metaphysician. I am far from maintaining that this account applies uniformly to the productions of these two writers; but I think that, as far as they essentially differ, what I have stated is the general distinction between them. 'Roderick Random' is the purest of Smollett's novels: I mean in point of style and description. Most of the incidents and characters are supposed to have been taken from the events of his own life, and are therefore truer to nature. There is a rude conception of generosity in some of his characters, of which Fielding seems to have been incapable, his amiable persons being merely good-natured. It is owing to this that Strap is superior to Partridge, as there is a heartiness and warmth of feeling in some of the scenes between Lieutenant Bowling and his nephew, which is beyond Fielding's power of impassioned writing. The whole of the scene on ship-board is a most admirable and striking picture, and, I imagine, very little if at all exaggerated, though the interest it excites is of a very unpleasant kind, because the irritation and resistance to petty oppression can be of no avail. The picture of the little profligate French friar, who was Roderick's travelling companion, and of whom he always kept to the windward, is one of Smollett's most masterly sketches. 'Peregrine Pickle' is no great favourite of mine, and 'Launcelot Greaves' was not worthy of the genius of the author.

'Humphry Clinker' and 'Count Fathom' are both equally admirable in their way. Perhaps the former is the most pleasant gossiping novel that ever was written;

that which gives the most pleasure with the least effort to the reader. It is quite as amusing as going the journey could have been; and we have just as good an idea of what happened on the road, as if we had been of the party. Humphry Clinker himself is exquisite; and his sweetheart, Winifred Jenkins, not much behind him. Matthew Bramble, though not altogether original, is excellently supported, and seems to have been the prototype of Sir Anthony Absolute in the 'Rivals.' But Lismahago is the flower of the flock. His tenaciousness in argument is not so delightful as the relaxation of his logical severity, when he finds his fortune mellowing in the wintry smiles of Mrs. Tabitha Bramble. This is the best preserved, and most severe of all Smollett's characters. The resemblance to 'Don Quixote' is only just enough to make it interesting to the critical reader, without giving offence to anybody else. The indecency and filth in this novel are what must be allowed to all Smollett's writings. The subject and characters in 'Count Fathom' are, in general, exceedingly disgusting: the story is also spun out to a degree of tediousness in the serious and sentimental parts; but there is more power of writing occasionally shown in it than in any of his works. I need only refer to the fine and bitter irony of the Count's address to the country of his ancestors on his landing in England; to the robber scene in the forest, which has never been surpassed; to the Parisian swindler who personates a raw English country squire (Western is tame in the comparison); and to the story of the seduction in the west of England. It would be difficult to point out, in any author, passages written with more force and mastery than these.

It is not a very difficult undertaking to class Fielding or Smollett—the one as an observer of the characters of human life, the other as a describer of its various eccentricities. But it is by no means so easy to dispose of Richardson, who was neither an observer of the one, nor

a describer of the other; but who seemed to spin his materials entirely out of his own brain, as if there had been nothing existing in the world beyond the little room in which he sat writing. There is an artificial reality about his works, which is nowhere else to be met with. They have the romantic air of a pure fiction, with the literal minuteness of a common diary. The author had the strongest matter-of-fact imagination that ever existed, and wrote the oddest mixture of poetry and prose. He does not appear to have taken advantage of anything in actual nature, from one end of his works to the other; and yet, throughout all his works, voluminous as they are —and this, to be sure, is one reason why they are so—he sets about describing every object and transaction as if the whole had been given in on evidence by an eye-witness. This kind of high finishing from imagination is an anomaly in the history of human genius; and certainly nothing so fine was ever produced by the same accumulation of minute parts. There is not the least distraction, the least forgetfulness of the end: every circumstance is made to tell. I cannot agree that this exactness of detail produces heaviness; on the contrary, it gives an appearance of truth, and a positive interest to the story; and we listen with the same attention as we should to the particulars of a confidential communication. I at one time used to think some parts of 'Sir Charles Grandison' rather trifling and tedious, especially the long description of Miss Harriet Byron's wedding clothes, till I was told of two young ladies who had severally copied out the whole of that very description for their own private gratification. After that, I could not blame the author.

The effect of reading this work is like an increase of kindred. You find yourself all of a sudden introduced into the midst of a large family, with aunts and cousins to the third and fourth generation, and grandmothers both by the father's and mother's side; and a very odd set of

people they are, but people whose real existence and personal identity you can no more dispute than your own senses, for you see and hear all that they do or say. What is still more extraordinary, all this extreme elaborateness in working out the story, seems to have cost the author nothing; for it is said that the published works are mere abridgments. I have heard (though this I suspect must be a pleasant exaggeration), that 'Sir Charles Grandison' was originally written in eight and twenty volumes.

Pamela is the first of Richardson's productions, and the very child of his brain. Taking the general idea of the character of a modest and beautiful country girl, and of the ordinary situation in which she is placed, he makes out all the rest, even to the smallest circumstance, by the mere force of a reasoning imagination. It would seem as if a step lost would be as fatal here as in a mathematical demonstration. The development of the character is the most simple, and comes the nearest to nature that it can do, without being the same thing. The interest of the story increases with the dawn of understanding and reflection in the heroine: her sentiments gradually expand themselves, like opening flowers. She writes better every time, and acquires a confidence in herself, just as a girl would do, writing such letters in such circumstances; and yet it is certain *that no girl would write such letters in such circumstances.* What I mean is this—Richardson's nature is always the nature of sentiment and reflection, not of impulse or situation. He furnishes his characters, on every occasion, with the presence of mind of the author. He makes them act, not as they would from the impulse of the moment, but as they might upon reflection, and upon a careful review of every motive and circumstance in their situation. They regularly sit down to write letters: and if the business of life consisted in letter-writing, and was carried on by the post (like a Spanish game at chess), human nature would be what Richardson represents it.

All actual objects and feelings are blunted and deadened by being presented through a medium which may be true to reason, but is false in nature. He confounds his own point of view with that of the immediate actors in the scene, and hence presents you with a conventional and factitious nature, instead of that which is real. Dr. Johnson seems to have preferred this truth of reflection to the truth of nature, when he said that there was more knowledge of the human heart in a page of Richardson, than in all Fielding. Fielding, however, saw more of the practical results, and understood the principles as well; but he had not the same power of speculating upon their possible results, and combining them in certain ideal forms of passion and imagination, which was Richardson's real excellence.

It must be observed, however, that it is this mutual good understanding, and comparing of notes between the author and the persons he describes: his infinite circumspection, his exact process of ratiocination and calculation, which gives such an appearance of coldness and formality to most of his characters—which makes prudes of his women, and coxcombs of his men. Everything is too conscious in his works. Everything is distinctly brought home to the mind of the actors in the scene, which is a fault undoubtedly; but then it must be confessed, everything is brought home in its full force to the mind of the reader also, and we feel the same interest in the story as if it were our own. Can anything be more beautiful or more affecting than Pamela's reproaches to her 'lumpish heart,' when she is sent away from her master's at her own request: its lightness, when she is sent for back: the joy which the conviction of the sincerity of his love diffuses in her heart, like the coming on of spring; the artifice of the stuff gown: the meeting with Lady Davers after her marriage: and the trial-scene with her husband? Who ever remained insensible to the passion of Lady

Clementina, except Sir Charles Grandison himself, who was the object of it? Clarissa is, however, his masterpiece, if we except Lovelace. If she is fine in herself, she is still finer in his account of her. With that foil her purity is dazzling indeed: and she who could triumph by her virtue and the force of her love over the regality of Lovelace's mind, his wit, his person, his accomplishments and his spirit, conquers all hearts. I should suppose that never sympathy more deep or sincere was excited than by the heroine of Richardson's romance, except by the calamities of real life. The links in this wonderful chain of interest are not more finely wrought, than their whole weight is overwhelming and irresistible. Who can forget the exquisite gradations of her long dying scene, or the closing of the coffin-lid, when Miss Howe comes to take her last leave of her friend; or the heart-breaking reflection that Clarissa makes on what was to have been her wedding day? Well does a certain writer exclaim—

> "Books are a real world, both pure and good,
> Round which with tendrils strong as flesh and blood,
> Our pastime and our happiness may grow!"

Richardson's wit was unlike that of any other writer: his humour was so too. Both were the effect of intense activity of mind: laboured, and yet completely effectual. I might refer to Lovelace's reception and description of Hickman, when he calls out Death in his ear, as the name of the person with whom Clarissa had fallen in love, and to the scene at the glove shop. What can be more magnificent than his enumeration of his companions—"Belton, so pert and so pimply: Tourville, so fair and so foppish!" &c. In casuistry this author is quite at home; and with a boldness greater even than his puritanical severity, [he] has exhausted every topic on virtue and vice. There is another peculiarity in Richardson not perhaps so uncommon, which is his systematically preferring his most insipid characters to his finest, though both were equally

his own invention, and he must be supposed to have understood something of their qualities. Thus he preferred the little, selfish, affected, insignificant Miss Byron to the Divine Clementina, and, again, Sir Charles Grandison to the nobler Lovelace. I have nothing to say in favour of Lovelace's morality; but Sir Charles is the prince of coxcombs, whose eye was never once taken from his own person and his own virtues, and there is nothing which excites so little sympathy as this excessive egotism.

It remains to speak of Sterne; and I shall do it in few words. There is more of *mannerism* and affectation in him, and a more immediate reference to preceding authors; but his excellences, where he is excellent, are of the first order. His characters are intellectual and inventive, like Richardson's, but totally opposite in the execution. The one are made out by continuity and patient repetition of touches: the others, by glancing transitions and graceful apposition. His style is equally different from Richardson's: it is at times the most rapid, the most happy, the most idiomatic of any that is to be found. It is the pure essence of English conversational style. His works consist only of *morceaux*—of brilliant passages. I wonder that Goldsmith, who ought to have known better, should call him "a dull fellow." His wit is poignant, though artificial; and his characters (though the groundwork of some of them had been laid before) have yet invaluable original differences; and the spirit of the execution, the master-strokes constantly thrown into them, are not to be surpassed. It is sufficient to name them:—Yorick, Dr. Slop, Mr. Shandy, My Uncle Toby, Trim, Susanna, and the Widow Wadman. In these he has contrived to oppose with equal felicity and originality two characters, one of pure intellect, and the other of pure good nature, in My Father and My Uncle Toby. There appears to have been in Sterne a vein of dry, sarcastic humour, and of extreme tenderness of feeling; the latter sometimes

carried to affectation, as in the tale of 'Maria' and the apostrophe to the recording angel: but at other times pure and without blemish. The story of Le Fevre is perhaps the finest in the English language. My Father's restlessness, both of body and mind, is inimitable. It is the model from which all those despicable performances against modern philosophy ought to have been copied, if their authors had known anything of the subject they were writing about. My Uncle Toby is one of the finest compliments ever paid to human nature. He is the most unoffending of God's creatures; or, as the French express it, *un tel petit bon homme!* Of his bowling-green, his sieges, and his amours, who would say or think anything amiss?

It is remarkable that our four best novel writers belong nearly to the same age. We also owe to the same period (the reign of George II.) the inimitable Hogarth, and some of our best writers of the middle style of comedy. If I were called upon to account for this coincidence, I should waive the consideration of more general causes, and ascribe it at once to the establishment of the Protestant ascendancy, and the succession of the House of Hanover. These great events appear to have given a more popular turn to our literature and genius, as well as to our government. It was found high time that the people should be represented in books as well as in Parliament. They wished to see some account of themselves in what they read; and not to be confined always to the vices, the miseries, and frivolities of the great. Our domestic tragedy, and our earliest periodical works, appeared a little before the same period. In despotic countries, human nature is not of sufficient importance to be studied or described. The *canaille* are objects rather of disgust than curiosity; and there are no middle classes. The works of Racine and Molière are either imitations of the verbiage of the court, before which they were repre-

sented, or fanciful caricatures of the manners of the lowest of the people. But in the period of our history in question, a security of person and property, and a freedom of opinion, had been established, which made every man feel of some consequence to himself, and appear an object of some curiosity to his neighbours; our manners became more domesticated; there was a general spirit of sturdiness and independence, which made the English character more truly English than perhaps at any other period—that is, more tenacious of its own opinions and purposes. The whole surface of society appeared cut out into square enclosures and sharp angles, which extended to the dresses of the time, their gravel walks and clipped hedges. Each individual had a certain ground-plot of his own to cultivate his particular humours in, and let them shoot out at pleasure; and a most plentiful crop they have produced accordingly. The reign of George II. was, in a word, the age of *hobby-horses;* but since that period things have taken a different turn.

His present Majesty * (God save the mark!) during almost the whole of his reign has been constantly mounted on a great war-horse, and has fairly driven all competitors out of the field. Instead of minding our own affairs, or laughing at each other, the eyes of all his faithful subjects have been fixed on the career of the sovereign, and all hearts anxious for the safety of his person and government, Our pens and our swords have been alike drawn in their defence; and the returns of killed and wounded, the manufacture of newspapers and parliamentary speeches, have exceeded all former example. If we have had little of the blessings of peace, we have had enough of the glories and calamities of war. His Majesty has indeed contrived to keep alive the greatest public interest ever known, by his determined manner of riding his hobby for half a century together, with the aristocracy, the demo-

* George III.—Ed.

cracy, the clergy, the landed and monied interest, and the rabble, in full cry after him; and at the end of his career, most happily and unexpectedly succeeded, amidst empires lost and won, kingdoms overturned and created, and the destruction of an incredible number of lives, in restoring *the divine right of kings*, and thus preventing any future abuse of the example which seated his family on the throne!

It is not to be wondered at, if amidst the tumult of events crowded into this period, our literature has partaken of the disorder of the time: if our prose has run mad, and our poetry grown childish. Among those persons who "have kept the even tenor of their way," the author of 'Evelina,' 'Cecilia,' and 'Camilla,' must be allowed to hold a distinguished place.* Mrs. Radcliffe's "enchantments drear," and mouldering castles, derived part of their interest, no doubt, from the supposed tottering state of all old structures at the time; and Mrs. Inchbald's 'Nature and Art' would scarcely have had the same popularity, but that it fell in (as to its two main characters) with the prevailing prejudice of the moment, that judges and bishops were not invariably pure abstractions of justice and piety. Miss Edgeworth's 'Tales' again (with the exception of 'Castle Rack-rent,' which is a genuine, unsophisticated, national portrait) are a kind of pedantic, pragmatical common sense, tinctured with the pertness and pretensions of the paradoxes to which they are so self-complacently opposed. Madame D'Arblay is, on the contrary, quite of the old school, a mere common observer of manners, and also a very woman. It is this last circumstance which forms the peculiarity of her writings,

* The 'Fool of Quality' [by Henry Brooke, reprinted of late years], 'David Simple,' and 'Sidney Biddulph,' written about the middle of the last century, belong to the ancient *regime* of novel-writing. Of the 'Vicar of Wakefield' I have attempted a character elsewhere.

and distinguishes them from those masterpieces which I have before mentioned. She is a quick, lively, and accurate observer of persons and things; but she always looks at them with a consciousness of her sex, and in that point of view in which it is the particular business and interest of women to observe them. There is little in her works of passion or character, or even manners, in the most extended sense of the word, as implying the sum-total of our habits and pursuits; her *forte* is in describing the absurdities and affectations of external behaviour, or *the manners of people in company*. Her characters, which are ingenious caricatures, are, no doubt, distinctly marked, and well kept up; but they are slightly shaded, and exceedingly uniform. Her heroes and heroines, almost all of them, depend upon the stock of a single phrase or sentiment, and have certain mottoes or devices by which they may always be known. They form such characters as people might be supposed to assume for a night at a masquerade. She presents, not the whole-length figure, nor even the face, but some prominent feature. In one of her novels, for example, a lady appears regularly every ten pages, to get a lesson in music for nothing. She never appears for any other purpose; this is all you know of her; and in this the whole wit and humour of the character consist. Meadows is the same, who has always the cue of being tired, without any other idea. It has been said of Shakspeare, that you may always assign his speeches to the proper characters; and you may infallibly do the same thing with Madame D'Arblay's, for they always say the same thing. The Branghtons are the best. Mr. Smith is an exquisite city portrait. 'Evelina' is also her best novel, because it is the shortest; that is, it has all the liveliness in the sketches of character, and smartness of comic dialogue and repartee, without the tediousness of the story, and endless affectation of sentiment which disfigures the others.

Women, in general, have a quicker perception of any oddity or singularity of character than men, and are more alive to every absurdity which arises from a violation of the rules of society, or a deviation from established custom. This partly arises from the restraints in their own behaviour, which turn their attention constantly on the subject, and partly from other causes. The surface of their minds, like that of their bodies, seems of a finer texture than ours—more soft, and susceptible of immediate impulses. They have less muscular strength, less power of continued voluntary attention—of reason, passion, and imagination; but they are more easily impressed with whatever appeals to their senses or habitual prejudices. The intuitive perception of their minds is less disturbed by any abstruse reasonings on causes or consequences. They learn the idiom of character and manners, as they acquire that of language, by rote without troubling themselves about the principles. Their observation is not the less accurate on that account, as far as it goes; for it has been well said, that "there is nothing so true as habit."

There is little other power in Miss Burney's novels, than that of immediate observation: her characters, whether of refinement or vulgarity, are equally superficial and confined. The whole is a question of form, whether that form is adhered to or infringed upon. It is this circumstance which takes away dignity and interest from her story and sentiments, and makes the one so teazing and tedious, and the other so insipid. The difficulties in which she involves her heroines are too much "Female Difficulties;" they are difficulties created out of nothing. The author appears to have no other idea of refinement than that it is the reverse of vulgarity; but the reverse of vulgarity is fastidiousness and affectation. There is a true and a false delicacy. Because a vulgar country Miss would answer "yes" to a proposal of marriage in the first page, Madame D'Arblay makes it a proof of an excess of

refinement, and an indispensable point of etiquette in her young ladies, to postpone the answer to the end of five volumes, without the smallest reason for their doing so, and with every reason to the contrary. The reader is led every moment to expect a *dénouement*, and is as often disappointed on some trifling pretext. The whole artifice of her fable consists in coming to no conclusion. Her ladies "stand so upon the order of their going," that they do not go at all. They will not abate an ace of their punctilio in any circumstances, or on any emergency. They would consider it as quite indecorous to run down stairs though the house were in flames, or to move an inch off the pavement though a scaffolding was falling. She has formed to herself an abstract idea of perfection in common behaviour, which is quite as romantic and impracticable as any other idea of the sort: and the consequence has naturally been, that she makes her heroines commit the greatest improprieties and absurdities in order to avoid the smallest. In opposition to a maxim in philosophy, they constantly act from the weakest motive, or rather from pure contradiction. The whole tissue of the fable is, in general, more wild and chimerical than anything in 'Don Quixote,' without the poetical truth or elevation. Madame D'Arblay has woven a web of difficulties for her heroines, something like the green silken threads in which the shepherdesses entangled the steed of Cervantes' hero, who swore, in his fine enthusiastic way, that he would sooner cut his passage to another world than disturb the least of those beautiful meshes. To mention the most painful instance--the Wanderer, in her last novel, raises obstacles, lighter than "the gossamer that idles in the wanton summer air," into insurmountable barriers; and trifles with those that arise out of common sense, reason and necessity. Her conduct is not to be accounted for directly out of the circumstances in which she is placed, but out of some factitious and misplaced refinement on

them. It is a perpetual game at cross-purposes. There being a plain and strong motive why she should pursue any course of action, is a sufficient reason for her to avoid it; and the perversity of her conduct is in proportion to its levity—as the lightness of the feather baffles the force of the impulse that is given to it, and the slightest breath of air turns it back on the hand from which it is thrown. We can hardly consider this as the perfection of the female character.

I must say I like Mrs. Radcliffe's romances better, and think of them oftener; and even when I do not, part of the impression with which I survey the full-orbed moon shining in the blue expanse of heaven, or hear the wind sighing through autumnal leaves, or walk under the echoing archways of a Gothic ruin, is owing to a repeated perusal of the 'Romance of the Forest' and the 'Mysteries of Udolpho.' Her descriptions of scenery, indeed, are vague and wordy to the last degree; they are neither like Salvator nor Claude, nor nature nor art; and she dwells on the effects of moonlight till we are sometimes weary of them: her characters are insipid, the shadows of a shade, continued on, under different names, through all her novels: her story comes to nothing. But in harrowing up the soul with imaginary horrors, and making the flesh creep, and the nerves thrill, with fond hopes and fears, she is unrivalled among her fair countrywomen. Her great power lies in describing the indefinable, and embodying a phantom. She makes her readers twice children, and from the dim and shadowy veil which she draws over the objects of her fancy, forces us to believe all that is strange, and next to impossible, of their mysterious agency, whether it is the sound of the lover's lute borne o'er the distant waters along the winding shores of Provence, recalling with its magic breath some long-lost friendship or some hopeless love; or the full choir of the cloistered monks chaunting their midnight orgies, or the

lonely voice of an unhappy sister in her pensive cell, like angels' whispered music; or the deep sigh that steals from a dungeon on the startled ear; or the dim apparition of ghastly features; or the face of an assassin hid beneath a monk's cowl; or the robber gliding through the twilight gloom of the forest. All the fascination that links the world of passion to the world unknown, is hers, and she plays with it at her pleasure: she has all the poetry of romance, all that is obscure, visionary and objectless, in the imagination. It seems that the simple notes of Clara's lute, which so delighted her youthful heart, still echo among the rocks and mountains of the Valois; the mellow tones of the minstrel's songs still mingle with the noise of the dashing oar, and the rippling of the silver waves of the Mediterranean; the voice of Agnes is heard from the haunted tower; and Schedoni's form still stalks through the frowning ruins of Palinzi. The greatest treat, however, which Mrs. Radcliffe's pen has provided for the lovers of the marvellous and terrible, is the Provençal tale which Ludovico reads in the Castle of Udolpho, as the lights are beginning to burn blue, and just before the faces appear from behind the tapestry that carry him off, and we hear no more of him. This tale is of a knight, who being engaged in a dance at some high festival of old romance, was summoned out by another knight clad in complete steel; and being solemnly adjured to follow him into the mazes of the neighbouring wood, his conductor brought him at length to a hollow glade in the thickest part, where he pointed to the murdered corse of another knight, and lifting up his beaver, showed him by the gleam of moonlight which fell on it, that it had the face of his spectre-guide! The dramatic power in the character of Schedoni, the Italian monk, has been much admired and praised; but the effect does not depend upon the character, but the situations: not upon the figure, but upon the background. The 'Castle of Otranto' (which is sup-

posed to have led the way to this style of writing) is, to my notion, dry, meagre, and without effect. It is done upon false principles of taste. The great hand and arm, which are thrust into the court-yard, and remain there all day long, are the pasteboard machinery of a pantomime; they shock the senses, and have no purchase upon the imagination. They are a matter-of-fact impossibility: a fixture, and no longer a phantom. *Quodcunque ostendis mihi sic, incredulus odi.* By realising the chimeras of ignorance and fear, begot upon shadows and dim likenesses, we take away the very grounds of credulity and superstition; and, as in other cases, by facing out the imposture betray the secret to the contempt and laughter of the spectators. The 'Recess' and the 'Old English Baron' are also "dismal treatises," but with little in them "at which our fell of hair is likely to rouse and stir as life were in it." They are dull and prosing, without the spirit of fiction or the air of tradition to make them interesting. After Mrs. Radcliffe, Monk Lewis was the greatest master of the art of freezing the blood. The robber-scene in the 'Monk' is only inferior to that in 'Count Fathom,' and perfectly new in the circumstances and cast of the characters. Some of his descriptions are chargeable with unpardonable grossness, but the pieces of poetry interspersed in this far-famed novel, such as the fight of Roncesvalles and the Exile in particular, have a romantic and delightful harmony, such as might be chaunted by the moonlight pilgrim, or might lull the dreaming mariner on summer seas.

If Mrs. Radcliffe touched the trembling chords of the imagination, making wild music there, Mrs. Inchbald has no less power over the springs of the heart. She not only moves the affections, but melts us into "all the luxury of woe." Her 'Nature and Art' is one of the most pathetic and interesting stories in the world. It is, indeed, too much so; or the distress is too naked, and the situations

hardly to be borne with patience. I think nothing, however, can exceed in delicacy and beauty the account of the love-letter which the poor girl, who is the subject of the story, receives from her lover, and which she is a fortnight in spelling out, sooner than show it to any one else; nor the dreadful catastrophe of the last fatal scene, in which the same poor creature, as her former seducer, now become her judge, is about to pronounce sentence of death upon her, cries out in agony—"Oh, not from you!" The effect of this novel upon the feelings is not only of the most distressing, but withering kind. It blights the sentiments, and haunts the memory. The 'Simple Story is not much better in this respect: the gloom, however, which hangs over it, is of a more fixed and tender kind: we are not now lifted to ecstasy, only to be plunged in madness; and besides the sweetness and dignity of some of the characters, there are redeeming traits, retrospective glances on the course of human life, which brighten the backward stream, and smile in hope or patience to the last. Such is the account of Sandford, her stern and inflexible adviser, sitting by the bedside of Miss Miller, and comforting her in her dying moments; thus softening the worst pang of human nature, and reconciling us to the best, but not most shining virtues in human character. The conclusion of 'Nature and Art,' on the contrary, is a scene of heartless desolation, which must effectually deter any one from ever reading the book twice. Mrs. Inchbald is an instance to confute the assertion of Rousseau, that women fail whenever they attempt to describe the passion of love.

I shall conclude this Lecture by saying a few words of the author of 'Caleb Williams,'* and the author of 'Waverley.' I shall speak of the last first. In knowledge, in variety, in facility, in truth of painting, in costume and scenery, in freshness of subject and in untired interest, in

* William Godwin.—Ed.

glancing lights and the graces of a style passing at will from grave to gay, from lively to severe, at once romantic and familiar, having the utmost force of imitation and apparent freedom of invention, these novels have the highest claims to admiration. What lack they yet? The author has all power given him from without—he has not, perhaps, an equal power from within. The intensity of the feeling is not equal to the distinctness of the imagery. He sits like a magician in his cell, and conjures up all shapes and sights to the view; and with a little variation we might apply to him what Spenser says of Fancy:—

> "His chamber was depainted all within
> With sundry colours, in which were writ
> Infinite shape of things dispersed thin;
> Some such as in the world were never yet;
> Some daily seen and knowen by their names,
> Such as in idle fantasies do flit;
> Infernal hags, centaurs, fiends, hippodames,
> Apes, lions, eagles, owls, fools, lovers, children, dames."

In the midst of all this phantasmagoria, the author himself never appears to take part with his characters, to prompt our affection to the good, or sharpen our antipathy to the bad. It is the perfection of art to conceal art; and this is here done so completely, that while it adds to our pleasure in the work, it seems to take away from the merit of the author. As he does not thrust himself forward in the foreground, he loses the credit of the performance. The copies are so true to nature, that they appear like tapestry figures taken off by the pattern—the obvious patchwork of tradition and history. His characters are transplanted at once from their native soil to the page which we are reading, without any traces of their having passed through the hot-bed of the author's genius or vanity. He leaves them as he found them; but this is doing wonders. The Laird and the Bailie of Bradwardine, the idiot rhymer David Gellatly, Miss Rose Bradwardine

and Miss Flora Mac Ivor, her brother the Highland Jacobite chieftain, Vich Ian Vohr, the Highland rover, Donald Bean Lean, and the worthy page Callum Beg, Bothwell, and Balfour of Burley, Claverhouse and Macbriar, Elshie, the Black Dwarf, and the Red Reever of Westburn Flat, Hobbie and Grace Armstrong, Lucy Bertram and Dominie Sampson, Dirk Hatteraick and Meg Merrilies, are at present "familiar in our mouths as household names," and whether they are actual persons or creations of the poet's pen, is an impertinent inquiry. The picturesque and local scenery is as fresh as the lichen on the rock: the characters are a part of the scenery. If they are put in action, it is a moving picture: if they speak, we hear their dialect and the tones of their voice. If the humour is made out by dialect, the character by the dress, the interest by the facts and documents in the author's possession, we have no right to complain, if it is made out; but sometimes it hardly is, and then we have a right to say so. For instance, in the 'Tales of my Landlord,' Canny Elshie is not in himself so formidable or petrific a person as the real Black Dwarf, called David Ritchie, nor are his acts or sayings so staggering to the imagination. Again, the first introduction of this extraordinary personage, groping about among the hoary twilight ruins of the Witch of Micklestane Moor and her Grey Geese, is as full of preternatural power and bewildering effect (according to the tradition of the country) as can be; while the last decisive scene, where the Dwarf, in his resumed character of Sir Edward Mauley, comes from the tomb in the chapel, to prevent the forced marriage of the daughter of his former betrothed mistress with the man she abhors, is altogether powerless and tame. No situation could be imagined more finely calculated to call forth an author's powers of imagination and passion; but nothing is done. The assembly is dispersed under circumstances of the strongest natural

feeling, and the most appalling preternatural appearances, just as if the effect had been produced by a peace-officer entering for the same purpose. These instances of a falling off are, however, rare; and if this author should not be supposed by fastidious critics to have original genius in the highest degree, he has other qualities which supply its place so well: his materials are so rich and varied, and he uses them so lavishly, that the reader is no loser by the exchange. We are not in fear that he should publish another novel; we are under no apprehension of his exhausting himself, for he has shown that he is inexhaustible.

Whoever else is, it is pretty clear that the author of 'Caleb Williams' and 'St. Leon' is not the author of 'Waverley.' Nothing can be more distinct or excellent in their several ways than these two writers. If the one owes almost everything to external observation and traditional character, the other owes everything to internal conception and contemplation of the possible workings of the human mind. There is little knowledge of the world, little variety, neither an eye for the picturesque, nor a talent for the humorous in 'Caleb Williams,' for instance, but you cannot doubt for a moment of the originality of the work and the force of the conception. The impression made upon the reader is the exact measure of the strength of the author's genius. For the effect, both in 'Caleb Williams' and 'St. Leon,' is entirely made out, neither by facts, nor dates, by black-letter or magazine learning, by transcript nor record, but by intense and patient study of the human heart, and by an imagination projecting itself into certain situations, and capable of working up its imaginary feelings to the height of reality. The author launches into the ideal world, and must sustain himself and the reader there by the mere force of imagination. The sense of power in the writer thus adds to the interest of the subject. The character of Falkland is a sort of

apotheosis of the love of fame. The gay, the gallant Falkland lives only in the good opinion of good men; for this he adorns his soul with virtue, and tarnishes it with crime; he lives only for this, and dies as he loses it. He is a lover of virtue, but a worshipper of fame. Stung to madness by a brutal insult, he avenges himself by a crime of the deepest dye, and the remorse of his conscience and the stain upon his honour prey upon his peace and reason ever after. It was into the mouth of such a character that a modern poet has well put the words,

> "——— Action is momentary,
> The motion of a muscle, this way or that;
> Suffering is long, obscure, and infinite."

In the conflict of his feelings, he is worn to a skeleton, wasted to a shadow. But he endures this living death to watch over his undying reputation, and to preserve his name unsullied and free from suspicion. But he is at last disappointed in this his darling object, by the very means he takes to secure it, and by harassing and goading Caleb Williams (whose insatiable, incessant curiosity had wormed itself into his confidence) to a state of desperation, by employing every sort of persecution, and by trying to hunt him from society like an infection, makes him turn upon him, and betray the inmost secret of his soul. The last moments of Falkland are indeed sublime: the spark of life and the hope of imperishable renown are extinguished in him together; and bending his last look of forgiveness on his victim and destroyer, he dies a martyr to fame, but a confessor at the shrine of virtue! The re-action and play of these two characters into each other's hands (like Othello and Iago) is inimitably well managed, and on a par with anything in the dramatic art; but Falkland is the hero of the story, Caleb Williams is only the instrument of it. This novel is utterly unlike anything else that ever was written, and is one of the most original as well as powerful productions in the English

language. 'St. Leon' is not equal to it in the plot and groundwork, though perhaps superior in the execution. In the one Mr. Godwin has hit upon the extreme point of the perfectly natural and perfectly new; in the other he ventures into the preternatural world, and comes nearer to the world of common-place. Still the character is of the same exalted intellectual kind. As the ruling passion of the one was the love of fame, so in the other the sole business of life is thought. Raised by the fatal discovery of the philosopher's stone above mortality, he is cut off from all participation with its pleasures. He is a limb torn from society. In possession of eternal youth and beauty, he can feel no love; surrounded, tantalized, tormented with riches, he can do no good. The races of men pass before him as in a *speculum;* but he is attached to them by no common tie of sympathy or suffering. He is thrown back into himself and his own thoughts. He lives in the solitude of his own breast, without wife or child, or friend, or enemy in the world. His is the solitude of the soul, not of woods, or seas, or mountains, —but the desert of society, the waste and desolation of the heart. He is himself alone. His existence is purely contemplative, and is therefore intolerable to one who has felt the rapture of affection or the anguish of woe. The contrast between the enthusiastic eagerness of human pursuits and their blank disappointment, was never, perhaps, more finely portrayed than in this novel. Marguerite, the wife of St. Leon, is an instance of pure and disinterested affection in one of the noblest of her sex. It is not improbable that the author found the model of this character in nature. Of 'Mandeville,' I shall say only one word. It appears to me to be a falling-off in the subject, not in the ability. The style and declamation are even more powerful than ever. But unless an author surpasses himself, and surprises the public as much the fourth or fifth time as he did the first, he is said to fall off,

because there is not the same stimulus of novelty. A great deal is here made out of nothing, or out of a very disagreeable subject. I cannot agree that the story is out of nature. The feeling is very common indeed, though carried to an unusual and improbable excess, or to one with which, from the individuality and minuteness of the circumstances, we cannot readily sympathise.

It is rare that a philosopher is a writer of romances. The union of the two characters in this author is a sort of phenomenon in the history of letters; for I cannot but consider the author of 'Political Justice' as a philosophical reasoner of no ordinary stamp or pretensions. That work, whatever its defects may be, is distinguished by the most acute and severe logic, and by the utmost boldness of thinking, founded on a love and conviction of truth. It is a system of ethics, and one that, though I think it erroneous myself, is built on following up into its fair consequences a very common and acknowledged principle—that abstract reason and general utility are the only test and standard of moral rectitude. If this principle is true, then the system is true; but I think that Mr. Godwin's book has done more than anything else to overturn the sufficiency of this principle by abstracting, in a strict metaphysical process, the influence of reason or the understanding in moral questions and relations from that of habit, sense, association, local and personal attachment, natural affection, &c.; and by thus making it appear how necessary the latter are to our limited, imperfect, and mixed being, how impossible the former as an exclusive guide of action, unless men were, or were capable of becoming, purely intellectual beings.* Reason is no doubt one faculty of the human mind, and the chief gift of Providence to man; but it must itself be subject to and modified by other instincts and principles, because it is not

* Original edition has, by an apparent slip of the pen, *a purely intellectual being.*—Ed.

the only one. This work then, even supposing it to be false, is invaluable as demonstrating an important truth by the *reductio ad absurdum;* or it is an *experimentum crucis* in one of the grand and trying questions of moral philosophy. In delineating the character and feelings of the hermetic philosopher St. Leon, perhaps the author had not far to go from those of a speculative philosophical recluse. He who deals in the secrets of magic, or in the secrets of the human mind, is too often looked upon with jealous eyes by the world, which is no great conjuror; he who pours out his intellectual wealth into the lap of the public, is hated by those who cannot understand how he came by it; he who thinks beyond his age, cannot expect the feelings of his contemporaries to go along with him; he whose mind is of no age or country, is seldom properly recognised during his lifetime, and must wait, in order to have justice done him, for the late but lasting award of posterity. "Where his treasure is, there his heart is also."

LECTURE VII.

ON THE WORKS OF HOGARTH. ON THE GRAND AND FAMILIAR STYLE OF PAINTING.

If the quantity of amusement, or of matter for more serious reflection which their works have afforded, is that by which we are to judge of precedence among the intellectual benefactors of mankind, there are, perhaps, few persons who can put in a stronger claim to our gratitude than Hogarth. It is not hazarding too much to assert, that he was one of the greatest comic geniuses that ever lived, and he was certainly one of the most extraordinary men this country has produced. The wonderful knowledge which he possessed of human life and manners, is only to be surpassed (if it can be) by the power of invention with which he has combined and contrasted his materials in the most ludicrous and varied points of view, and by the mastery of execution with which he has embodied and made tangible the very thoughts and passing movements of the mind. Critics sometimes object to the style of Hogarth's pictures, or to the class to which they belong. First, he belongs to no class, or, if he does, it is to the same class as Fielding, Smollett, Vanbrugh, and Molière. Besides, the merit of his pictures does not depend on the nature of the subject, but on the knowledge displayed of it, on the number of ideas they excite, on the fund of thought and observation contained in them. They are to be studied as works of science as well as of amusement; they satisfy our love of truth; they fill up the void in the mind; they form a series of plates in natural history, and of that most interesting part of natural history,

the history of our own species. Make what deductions you please for the vulgarity of the subject, yet in the research, the profundity, the absolute truth and precision of the delineation of character: in the invention of incident, in wit and humour: in the life with which they are "instinct in every part:" in everlasting variety and originality, they never have, and probably never will be, surpassed. They stimulate the faculties as well as soothe them. "Other pictures we see, Hogarth's we read."

The public had not long ago an opportunity of viewing most of Hogarth's pictures, in the collection made of them at the British Gallery.* The superiority of the original paintings to the common prints, is in a great measure confined to the Marriage à la Mode with which I shall begin my remarks.

Boccaccio, the most refined and sentimental of all the novel-writers, has been stigmatised as a mere inventor of licentious tales, because readers in general have only seized on those things in his works which were suited to their own taste, and have thus reflected their own grossness back upon the writer. So it has happened that the majority of critics having been most struck with the strong and decided expression in Hogarth, the extreme delicacy and subtle gradations of character in his pictures have almost entirely escaped them. In the first picture of the Marriage à la Mode, the three figures of the young Nobleman, his intended Bride, and her Inamorato, the Lawyer, show how much Hogarth excelled in the power of giving soft and effeminate expression. They have, however, been less noticed than the other figures, which tell a plainer story, and convey a more palpable moral. Nothing can be more finely managed than the differences of character in these delicate personages. The beau sits smiling at

* In the author's 'Sketches of the Principal Picture-Galleries,' 1824, the present remarks are reprinted from this point with occasional verbal changes.—Ed.

the looking-glass with a reflected simper of self admiration, and a languishing inclination of the head, while the rest of his body is perked up on his high heels with a certain air of tip-toe elevation. He is the Narcissus of the reign of George II.; whose powdered peruke, ruffles, gold-lace, and patches, divide his self-love unequally with his own person—the true *Sir Plume* of his day:

> "Of amber-lidded snuff-box justly vain,
> And the nice conduct of a clouded cane."

Again we find the same felicity in the figure and attitude of the Bride, courted by the Lawyer. There is the utmost flexibility and yielding softness in her whole person, a listless languor and tremulous suspense in the expression of her face. It is the precise look and air which Pope has given to his favourite Belinda, just at the moment of the 'Rape of the Lock.' The heightened glow, the forward intelligence, and loosened soul of love in the same face, in the Assignation scene before the masquerade, form a fine and instructive contrast to the delicacy, timidity and coy reluctance expressed in the first. The Lawyer in both pictures is much the same, perhaps too much so; though even this unmoved, unaltered appearance may be designed as characteristic. In both cases he has "a person, and a smooth dispose, framed to make women false." He is full of that easy good humour, and easy good opinion of himself, with which the sex are often delighted. There is not a sharp angle in his face to obstruct his success, or give a hint of doubt or difficulty. His whole aspect is round and rosy, lively and unmeaning, happy without the least expense of thought, careless and inviting, and conveys a perfect idea of the uninterrupted glide and pleasing murmur of the soft periods that flow from his tongue.

The expression of the Bride in the Morning Scene is the most highly seasoned, and at the same time the most vulgar in the series. The figure, face, and attitude of the husband are inimitable. Hogarth has with great skill

contrasted the pale countenance of the husband with the yellow-whitish colour of the marble chimney-piece behind him, in such a manner as to preserve the fleshy tone of the former. The airy splendour of the view of the inner room in this picture is probably not exceeded by any of the productions of the Flemish school.

The young girl in the third picture, who is represented as the victim of fashionable profligacy, is unquestionably one of the artist's *chefs-d'œuvre*. The exquisite delicacy of the painting is only surpassed by the felicity and subtlety of the conception. Nothing can be more striking than the contrast between the extreme softness of her person and the hardened indifference of her character. The vacant stillness, the docility to vice, the premature suppression of youthful sensibility, the doll-like mechanism of the whole figure, which seems to have no other feeling but a sickly sense of pain, show the deepest insight into human nature, and into the effects of those refinements in depravity, by which it has been good-naturedly asserted that "vice loses half its evil in losing all its grossness." The story of this picture is in some parts very obscure and enigmatical. It is certain that the Nobleman is not looking straightforward to the Quack, whom he seems to have been threatening with his cane; but that his eyes are turned up with an ironical leer of triumph to the procuress. The commanding attitude and size of this woman, the swelling circumference of her dress, spread out like a turkey-cock's feathers, the fierce, ungovernable, inveterate malignity of her countenance which hardly needs the comment of the clasp knife to explain her purpose, are all admirable in themselves, and still more so, as they are opposed to the mute insensibility, the elegant negligence of dress, and the childish figure of the girl who is supposed to be her *protegée*. As for the Quack, there can be no doubt entertained about him. His face seems as if it were composed of salve, and his features exhibit all the

chaos and confusion of the most gross, ignorant, and impudent empiricism. The gradations of ridiculous affectation in the Music scene are finely imagined and preserved. The preposterous, overstrained admiration of the lady of quality: the sentimental, insipid, patient delight of the man, with his hair in papers, and sipping his tea; the pert, smirking, conceited, half-distorted approbation of the figure next to him; the transition to the total insensibility of the round face in profile, and then to the wonder of the negro-boy at the rapture of his mistress, form a perfect whole. The sanguine complexion and flame-coloured hair of the female virtuoso throw an additional light on the character. This is lost in the print. The continuing the red colour of the hair into the back of the chair, has been pointed out as one of those instances of what may be termed alliteration in colouring, of which these pictures are everywhere full. The gross bloated appearance of the Italian singer is well relieved by the hard features of the instrumental performer behind him, which might be carved of wood. The negro-boy holding the chocolate, both in expression, colour and execution, is a masterpiece. The gay, lively derision of the other negro-boy playing with the Actæon is an ingenious contrast to the profound amazement of the first. Some account has already been given of the two lovers in this picture. It is curious to observe the infinite activity of mind which the artist displays on every occasion. An instance occurs in the present picture. He has so contrived the papers in the hair of the bride, as to make them look almost like a wreath of half-blown flowers; while those which he has placed on the head of the musical amateur very much resemble a *cheveux-de-fris* of horns, which adorn and fortify the lack-lustre expression and mild resignation of the face beneath.

The Night Scene is inferior to the rest of the series. The attitude of the husband, who is just killed, is one in

which it would be impossible for him to stand or even to fall. It resembles the loose pasteboard figures they make for children. The characters in the last picture, in which the wife dies, are all masterly. I would particularly refer to the captious, petulant self-sufficiency of the Apothecary, whose face and figure are constructed on exact physiognomical principles, and to the fine example of passive obedience and non-resistance in the servant, whom he is taking to task, and whose coat of green and yellow livery is as long and melancholy as his face. The disconsolate look and haggard eyes, the open mouth, the comb sticking in the hair, the broken gapped teeth which, as it were, hitch in an answer—everything about him denotes the utmost perplexity and dismay. The harmony and gradations of colour in this picture are uniformly preserved with the greatest nicety, and are well worthy the attention of the artist. I have so far attempted to point out the fund of observation, physical and moral, contained in one set of these pictures, the Marriage à la Mode The rest would furnish as many topics to descant upon, were the patience of the reader as inexhaustible as the painter's invention. But as this is not the case, I shall content myself with barely referring to some of those figures in the other pictures, which appear to me the most striking, and which we see not only while we are looking at them, but which we have before us at all other times. For instance, who, having seen, can easily forget that exquisite frost-piece of religion and morality, the antiquated Prude in the Morning Scene, or that striking commentary on the *good old times*, the little wretched appendage of a Footboy who crawls, half famished and half frozen, behind her? The French man and woman, in the Noon, are the perfection of flighty affectation and studied grimace; the amiable *fraternization* of the two old women saluting each other is not enough to be admired; and in the little Master, in the same national group, we see the early

promise and personification of that eternal principle of wondrous self-complacency, proof against all circumstances, and which makes the French the only people who are vain even of being cuckolded and being conquered! Or shall we prefer to this the outrageous distress and unmitigated terrors of the Boy who has dropped his dish of meat, and who seems red all over with shame and vexation, and bursting with the noise he makes? Or what can be better than the good housewifery of the Girl underneath, who is devouring the lucky fragments; or than the plump, ripe, florid, luscious look of the Servant-wench near her, embraced by a greasy rascal of an Othello, with her pie-dish tottering like her virtue, and with the most precious part of its contents running over? Just—no, not quite—as good is the joke of the Woman overhead who, having quarrelled with her Husband, is throwing their Sunday's dinner out of the window, to complete this chapter of accidents of baked dishes. The Husband in the Evening Scene is certainly as meek as any recorded in history; but I cannot say that I admire this picture, or the Night Scene after it. But then, in the Taste in High-Life, there is that inimitable pair, differing only in sex, congratulating and delighting one another by "all the mutually reflected charities" of folly and affectation, with the young Lady coloured like a rose, dandling her little, black, pug-faced, white-teethed, chuckling favourite, and with the portrait of Monsieur Des Noyers in the background, dancing in a grand ballet, surrounded by butterflies. And again, in the Election Dinner, is the immortal Cobbler, surrounded by his Peers, who,

> "——— frequent and full,
> In *loud* recess and *brawling* conclave sit:"———

the Jew in the second picture, a very Jew in grain: innumerable fine sketches of heads in the Polling for Votes, of which the Nobleman overlooking the Caricaturist is the

second best, and the Blind-man going up to vote, the best; and then the irresistible, tumultuous display of broad humour in the Chairing the Member, which is perhaps, of all Hogarth's pictures, the most full of laughable incidents and situations; the yellow, rusty-faced Thresher with his swinging flail breaking the head of one of the chairmen; and his redoubted antagonist, the Sailor, with his oak-stick and stumping wooden-leg—a supplemental cudgel; the persevering ecstasy of the hobbling Blind Fiddler who, in the fray, appears to have been trod upon by the artificial excrescence of the honest tar; Monsieur the monkey, with piteous aspect, speculating the impending disaster of the triumphant Candidate, and his brother Bruin appropriating the paunch; the precipitous flight of the Pigs souse over head into the water; the fine Lady fainting, with vermilion lips; and the two Chimney Sweepers, satirical young rogues! I had almost forgot the Politician, who is burning a hole through his hat with a candle in reading a newspaper; and the Chickens in the March to Finchley, wandering in search of their lost dam, who is found in the pocket of the Serjeant. Of the pictures in the Rake's Progress, exhibited in this collection, I shall not here say anything, because I think them on the whole inferior to the prints, and because they have already been criticised by a writer, to whom I could add nothing, in a paper which ought to be read by every lover of Hogarth and of English genius—I mean Mr. Lamb's Essay on the works of Hogarth. I shall at present proceed to form some estimate of the style of art in which this painter excelled.

What distinguishes his compositions from all others of the same general kind, is, that they are equally remote from caricature, and from mere still life. It of course happens in subjects taken from common life, that the painter can procure real models, and he can get them to sit as long as he pleases. Hence, in general,

those attitudes and expressions have been chosen which could be assumed the longest; and in imitating which the artist, by taking pains and time, might produce almost as complete *fac-similes* as he could of a flower or a flower-pot, of a damask curtain or a china vase. The copy was as perfect and as uninteresting in the one case as in the other. On the contrary, subjects of drollery and ridicule affording frequent examples of strange deformity and peculiarity of features, these have been eagerly seized by another class of artists who, without subjecting themselves to the laborious drudgery of the Dutch school and their imitators, have produced our popular caricatures by rudely copying or exaggerating the casual irregularities of the human countenance. Hogarth has equally avoided the faults of both these styles: the insipid tameness of the one and the gross extravagance of the other, so as to give to the productions of his pencil equal solidity and effect. For his faces go to the very verge of caricature, and yet never (I believe in any single instance) go beyond it: they take the very widest latitude, and yet we always see the links which bind them to nature: they bear all the marks and carry all the conviction of reality with them, as if we had seen the actual faces for the first time, from the precision, consistency, and good sense with which the whole and every part is made out. They exhibit the most uncommon features with the most uncommon expressions, but which yet are as familiar and intelligible as possible, because with all the boldness, they have all the truth, of nature. Hogarth has left behind him as many of these memorable faces in their memorable moments as, perhaps, most of us remember in the course of our lives, and has thus doubled the quantity of our experience.

It will assist us in forming a more determinate idea of the peculiar genius of Hogarth, to compare him with a deservedly admired artist in our own times. The highest authority on art in this country, I understand, has pro-

nounced that Mr. Wilkie united the excellences of Hogarth to those of Teniers. I demur to this decision in both its branches; but in demurring to authority, it is necessary to give our reasons. I conceive that this ingenious and attentive observer of nature has certain essential, real and indisputable excellences of his own; and I think it, therefore, the less important to clothe him with any vicarious merits which do not belong to him. Mr. Wilkie's pictures, generally speaking, derive almost their whole value from their *reality*, or the truth of the representation. They are works of pure imitative art; and the test of this style of composition is to represent nature faithfully and happily in its simplest combinations. It may be said of an artist like Mr. Wilkie, that *nothing human is indifferent to him.* His mind takes an interest in, and it gives an interest to, the most familiar scenes and transactions of life. He professedly gives character, thought and passion in their lowest degrees, and in their every-day forms. He selects the commonest events and appearances of nature for his subjects, and trusts to their very commonness for the interest and amusement he is to excite. Mr. Wilkie is a serious, prosaic, literal narrator of facts; and his pictures may be considered as diaries, or minutes of what is passing constantly about us. Hogarth, on the contrary, is essentially a comic painter; his pictures are not indifferent, unimpassioned descriptions of human nature, but rich, exuberant satires upon it. He is carried away by a passion for the *ridiculous*. His object is "to show vice her own feature, scorn her own image." He is so far from contenting himself with still-life, that he is always on the verge of caricature, though without ever falling into it. He does not represent folly or vice in its incipient, or dormant, or *grub* state, but full grown, with wings, pampered into all sorts of affectation, airy, ostentatious and extravagant. Folly is there seen at the height, the moon is at the full; it is "the very error of

the time." There is a perpetual collision of eccentricities, a tilt and tournament of absurdities; the prejudices and caprices of mankind are let loose, and set together by the ears as in a bear-garden. Hogarth paints nothing but comedy or tragi-comedy. Wilkie paints neither one nor the other. Hogarth never looks at any object but to find out a moral or a ludicrous effect. Wilkie never looks at any object but to see that it is there. Hogarth's pictures are a perfect jest-book from one end to the other. I do not remember a single joke in Wilkie's, except one very bad one of the boy in the 'Blind Fiddler,' scraping the gridiron or fire-shovel, I forget which it is.* In looking at Hogarth, you are ready to burst your sides with laughing at the unaccountable jumble of odd things which are brought together; you look at Wilkie's pictures with a mingled feeling of curiosity and admiration at the accuracy of the representation. For instance, there is a most admirable head of a man coughing in the Rent-day; the action, the keeping, the choked sensation, are inimitable: but there is nothing to laugh at in a man coughing. What strikes the mind is the difficulty of a man's being painted coughing, which here certainly is a masterpiece of art. But turn to the blackguard Cobbler in the Election Dinner, who has been smutting his neighbour's face over, and who is lolling out his tongue at the joke with a most surprising obliquity of vision; and immediately "your lungs begin to crow like chanticleer." Again, there is the little boy crying in the Cut Finger, who only gives you the idea of a cross, disagreeable, obstinate child in pain: whereas the same face in Hogarth's Noon, from the ridiculous perplexity it is in, and its extravagant, noisy, unfelt distress at the accident of having let fall the pie-dish, is quite irresistible. Mr. Wilkie, in his picture of the Alehouse-door, I believe,

* The Waiter drawing the cork, in the Rent-day, is another exception, and quite Hogarthian.

painted Mr. Liston as one of the figures, without any great effect. Hogarth would have given any price for such a subject, and would have made it worth any money. I have never seen anything, in the expression of comic humour equal to Hogarth's pictures, but Liston's face!

Mr. Wilkie paints interiors: but still you generally connect them with the country. Hogarth, even when he paints people in the open air, represents them either as coming from London, as in the polling for votes at Brentford, or as returning to it, as the dyer and his wife at Bagnigge Wells. In this last picture, he has contrived to convert a common rural image into a type and emblem of city honours. In fact, I know no one who had a less pastoral imagination than Hogarth. He delights in the thick of St. Giles's or St. James's. His pictures breathe a certain close, greasy, tavern air. The fare he serves up to us consists of high-seasoned dishes, ragouts and olla podridas, like the supper in 'Gil Blas,' which it requires a strong stomach to digest. Mr. Wilkie presents us with a sort of lenten fare, very good and wholesome, but rather insipid than overpowering! Mr. Wilkie's pictures are, in general, much better painted than Hogarth's; but the Marriage à la Mode is superior both in colour and execution to any of Wilkie's. I may add here without any disparagement that, as an artist, Mr. Wilkie is hardly to be mentioned with Teniers. Neither in truth and brilliant clearness of colouring, nor in facility of execution, is there any comparison. Teniers was a perfect master in all these respects, and our own countryman is positively defective, notwithstanding the very laudable care with which he finishes every part of his pictures. There is an evident smear and dragging of the paint, which is also of a bad purple or puttyish tone, and which never appears in the pictures of the Flemish artist, any more than in a looking-glass. Teniers, probably from his facility of execution, succeeded in giving a more local and momentary

expression to his figures. They seem each going on with his particular amusement or occupation; Wilkie's have, in general, more a look of sitting for their pictures. Their compositions are very different also: and in this respect, I believe, Mr. Wilkie has the advantage. Teniers's boors are usually amusing themselves at skittles, or dancing, or drinking, or smoking, or doing what they like, in a careless, desultory way; and so the composition is loose and irregular. Wilkie's figures are all drawn up in a regular order, and engaged in one principal action, with occasional episodes. The story of the Blind Fiddler is the most interesting, and the best told. The two children standing before the musician are delightful. The Card-players is the best coloured of his pictures, if I am not mistaken. The Village Politicians, though excellent as to character and composition, is inferior as a picture to those which Mr. Wilkie has since painted. His latest pictures, however, do not appear to me to be his best. There is something of manner and affectation in the grouping of the figures, and a pink and rosy colour spread over them which is out of place. The hues of Rubens and Sir Joshua do not agree with Mr. Wilkie's subjects. One of his last pictures, that of Duncan Gray, is equally remarkable for sweetness and simplicity in colour, composition, and expression. I must here conclude this very general account; for to point out the particular beauties of every one of his pictures in detail, would require an Essay by itself.

I have promised to say something in this Lecture on the difference between the grand and familiar style of painting; and I shall throw out what imperfect hints I have been able to collect on this subject, so often attempted, and never yet succeeded in, taking the examples and illustrations from Hogarth, that is, from what he possessed or wanted in each kind.

And first, the difference is not that between imitation

and invention; for there is as much of this last quality in Hogarth, as in any painter or poet whatever. As, for example, to take two of his pictures only, I mean the Enraged Musician and the Gin Lane; in one of which every conceivable variety of disagreeable and discordant sound—the razor-grinder turning his wheel: the boy with his drum, and the girl with her rattle momentarily suspended: the pursuivant blowing his horn: the shrill milkwoman: the inexorable ballad-singer, with her squalling infant: the pewterer's shop close by: the fishwomen: the chimney-sweepers at the top of a chimney, and the two cats in melodious concert on the ridge of the tiles: with the bells ringing in the distance, as we see by the flags flying;—and in the other, the complicated forms and signs of death and ruinous decay—the woman on the stairs of the bridge asleep, letting her child fall over: her ghastly companion opposite, next to death's door, with hollow, famished cheeks and staring ribs: the dog fighting with the man for the bare shin-bone: the man hanging himself in a garret: the female corpse put into a coffin by the parish beadle: the men marching after a funeral, seen through a broken wall in the background: and the very houses reeling as if drunk and tumbling about the ears of the infatuated victims below, the pawnbroker's being the only one that stands firm and unimpaired—enforce the moral meant to be conveyed by each of these pieces with a richness and research of combination and artful contrast not easily paralleled in any production of the pencil or the pen. The clock pointing to four in the morning, in Modern Midnight Conversation, just as the immovable Parson Ford is filling out another glass from a brimming punch-bowl, while most of his companions, with the exception of the sly Lawyer, are falling around him "like leaves in October;" and again, the extraordinary mistake of the man leaning against the post, in the Lord Mayor's Procession—show a mind capable of seizing the

most rare and transient coincidences of things, of imagining what either never happened at all, or of instantly fixing on and applying to its purpose what never happened but once. So far, the invention shown in the great style of painting is poor in the comparison. Indeed, grandeur is supposed (whether rightly or not, I shall not here inquire) to imply a simplicity inconsistent with this inexhaustible variety of incident and circumstantial detail.

Secondly, the difference between the ideal and familiar style is not to be explained by the difference between the genteel and vulgar; for it is evident that Hogarth was almost as much at home in the genteel comedy as in the broad farce of his pictures. He excelled not only in exhibiting the coarse humours and disgusting incidents of low life, but in exhibiting the vices, follies, and frivolity of the fashionable manners of his time: his fine ladies hardly yield the palm to his waiting-maids, and his lords and his footmen are on a respectable footing of equality. There is no want, for example, in the Marriage-a-la-Mode, or in Taste in High Life, of affectation verging into idiotism, or of languid sensibility that might—

"Die of a rose in aromatic pain."

In short, Hogarth was a painter not of low, but of actual life; and the ridiculous and prominent features of high or low life, of the great vulgar or the small, lay equally open to him. The Country Girl, in the first plate of the Harlot's Progress, coming out of the waggon, is not more simple and ungainly than the same figure, in the second, is thoroughly initiated into the mysteries of her art, and suddenly accomplished in all the airs and graces of affectation, ease, and impudence. The affected languor and imbecility of the same girl afterwards, when put to beat hemp in Bridewell, is exactly in keeping with the character she has been taught to assume. Sir Joshua could do nothing like it in his line of portrait, which differed

chiefly in the background. The fine gentleman at his levee, in the Rake's Progress, is also a complete model of a person of rank and fortune, surrounded by needy and worthless adventurers, fiddlers, poetasters and virtuosi, as was the custom in those days. Lord Chesterfield himself would not have been disgraced by sitting for it. I might multiply examples to show that Hogarth was not characteristically deficient in that kind of elegance which arises from an habitual attention to external appearance and deportment. I will only add as instances, among his women, the two *elégantes* in the Bedlam scene, which are dressed (allowing for the difference of not quite a century) in the manner of Ackerman's dresses for May; and among the men, the Lawyer in Modern Midnight Conversation, whose gracious significant leer and sleek lubricated countenance exhibit all the happy finesse of his profession, when a silk gown has been added, or is likely to be added to it; and several figures in the Cockpit, who are evidently, at the first glance, gentlemen of the old school, and where the mixture of the blacklegs with the higher character is a still further test of the discriminating skill of the painter.

Again, Hogarth had not only a perception of fashion, but a sense of natural beauty. There are as many pleasing faces in his pictures as in Sir Joshua. Witness the girl picking the Rake's pocket in the Bagnio scene, whom we might suppose to be "the Charming Betsy Careless:" the Poet's wife, handsomer than falls to the lot of most poets, who are generally more intent upon the idea in their own minds than on the image before them, and are glad to take up with Dulcineas of their own creating: the theatrical heroine in the Southwark Fair, who would be an accession to either of our playhouses: the girl asleep, ogled by the clerk in church-time, and the sweetheart of the Good Apprentice in the reading-desk, in the second of that series, almost an ideal face and expression: the girl

in her cap selected for a partner by the footman in the print of Morning, very handsome . and many others equally so, scattered like "stray gifts of love and beauty" through these pictures. Hogarth was not then exclusively the painter of deformity. He painted beauty or ugliness indifferently, as they came in his way; and was not by nature confined to those faces which are painful and disgusting, as many would have us believe.

Again, neither are we to look for the solution of the difficulty in the difference between the comic and the tragic, between loose laughter and deep passion. For Mr. Lamb has shown unanswerably that Hogarth is quite at home in scenes of the deepest distress, in the heart-rending calamities of common life, in the expression of ungovernable rage, silent despair, or moody madness, enhanced by the tenderest sympathy, or aggravated by the frightful contrast of the most impenetrable and obdurate insensibility, as we see strikingly exemplified in the latter prints of the Rake's Progress. To the unbeliever in Hogarth's power over the passions and the feelings of the heart, the characters there speak like "the handwriting on the wall." If Mr. Lamb has gone too far in paralleling some of these appalling representations with Shakspeare, he was excusable in being led to set off what may be considered as a staggering paradox against a rooted prejudice. At any rate, the inferiority of Hogarth (be it what it may) did not arise from a want of passion and intense feeling; and in this respect he had the advantage over Fielding, for instance, and others of our comic writers, who excelled only in the light and ludicrous. There is in general a distinction, almost an impassable one, between the power of embodying the serious and the ludicrous; but these contradictory faculties were reconciled in Hogarth, as they were in Shakspeare, in Chaucer, and as it is said that they were in another extraordinary and later instance, Garrick's acting.

None of these then will do: neither will the most masterly and entire keeping of character lead us to an explanation of the grand and ideal style; for Hogarth possessed the most complete and absolute mastery over the truth and identity of expression and features in his subjects. Every stroke of his pencil tells according to a preconception in his mind. If the eye squints, the mouth is distorted; every feature acts, and is acted upon by the rest of the face; even the dress and attitude are such as could be proper to no other figure; the whole is under the influence of one impulse, that of truth and nature. Look at the heads in the Cockpit already mentioned, one of the most masterly of his productions in this way, where the workings of the mind are seen in every muscle of every face, and the same expression, more intense or relaxed, of hope or of fear, is stamped on each of the characters, so that you could no more transpose any part of one countenance to another, than you could change a profile to a front face. Hogarth was, in one sense, strictly an historical painter: that is, he represented the manners and humours of mankind in action, and their characters by varied expression. Everything in his pictures has life and motion in it. Not only does the business of the scene never stand still, but every feature is put into full play; the exact feeling of the moment is brought out, and carried to its utmost height, and then instantly seized and stamped on the canvas for ever. The expression is always taken *en passant*, in a state of progress or change, and, as it were, at the salient point. Besides the excellence of each individual face, the reflection of the expression from face to face, the contrast and struggle of particular motives and feelings in the different actors in the scene, as of anger, contempt, laughter, compassion, are conveyed in the happiest and most lively manner. His figures are not like the background on which they are painted: even the pictures on the wall have a peculiar look of their own,

All this is effected by a few decisive and rapid touches of the pencil, careless in appearance, but infallible in their results; so that one great criterion of the grand style insisted on by Sir Joshua Reynolds, that of leaving out the details, and attending to general character and outline,* belonged to Hogarth. He did not indeed arrive at middle forms or neutral expression, which Sir Joshua makes another test of the ideal; for Hogarth was not insipid. That was the last fault with which he could be charged. But he had breadth and boldness of manner, as well as any of them; so that neither does that constitute the *ideal.*

What then does? We have reduced this to something like the last remaining quantity in an equation, where all the others have been ascertained. Hogarth had all the other parts of an original and accomplished genius except this, but this he had not. He had an intense feeling and command over the impressions of sense, of habit, of character, and passion, the serious and the comic, in a word, of nature, as it fell within his own observation, or came within the sphere of his actual experience; but he had little power beyond that sphere, or sympathy with that which existed only *in idea.* He was "conformed to this world, not transformed." If he attempted to paint Pharoah's daughter, and Paul before Felix, he lost himself. His mind had feet and hands, but not wings to fly with. There is a mighty world of sense, of custom, of every-day action, of accidents and objects coming home to us, and interesting because they do so; the gross, material, stirring, noisy world of common life and selfish passion, of which Hogarth was absolute lord and master: there is another mightier world, that which exists only in conception and in power, the universe of thought and sentiment, that surrounds and is raised above the ordinary world of reality, as the empyrean surrounds this nether globe, into which few are privileged to soar with mighty wings out-

* See 'Table-Talk,' edit. 1821, vol. i. p. 314.—Ed.

spread, and in which, as power is given them to embody their aspiring fancies, to "give to airy nothing a local habitation and a name," to fill with imaginary shapes of beauty or sublimity, and make the dark abyss pregnant, bringing that which is remote home to us, raising themselves to the lofty, sustaining themselves on the refined and abstracted, making all things like not what we know and feel in ourselves, in this "ignorant present" time, but like what they must be in themselves, or in our noblest idea of them, and stamping that idea with reality (but chiefly clothing the best and the highest with grace and grandeur): this is the ideal in art, in poetry, and in painting. There are things which are cognisable only to sense, which interest only our more immediate instincts and passions: the want of food, the loss of a limb or of a sum of money; there are others that appeal to different and nobler faculties: the wants of the mind, the hunger and thirst after truth and beauty—that is, to faculties commensurate with objects greater and of greater refinement, which to be grand must extend beyond ourselves to others, and our interest in which must be refined in proportion as they do so.* The interest in these subjects is in proportion to the power of conceiving them, and the power of conceiving them is in proportion to the interest and affection for them, to the innate bias of the mind to elevate itself above everything low, and purify itself from everything gross. Hogarth only transcribes or transposes what was tangible and visible, not the abstracted and intelligible. You see in his pictures only the faces which you yourself have seen, or others like them; none of his

* When Meg Merrilies says in her dying moments—"Nay, nay, lay my head to the East," what was the East to her? Not a reality, but an idea of distant time and the land of her forefathers; the last, the strongest, and the best that occurred to her in this world. Her gipsy slang and dress were quaint and grotesque; her attachment to the Kaim of Dernecleugh and the wood of Warroch was romantic; her worship of the East was *ideal*.

characters are thinking of any person or thing out of the picture: you are only interested in the objects of their contention or pursuit, because they themselves are interested in them. There is nothing remote in thought, or comprehensive in feeling. The whole is intensely personal and local: but the interest of the ideal and poetical style of art relates to more permanent and universal objects; and the characters and forms must be such as to correspond with and sustain that interest, and give external grace and dignity to it. Such were the subjects which Raphael chose; faces imbued with unalterable sentiment, and figures that stand in the eternal silence of thought. He places before you objects of everlasting interest, events of greatest magnitude, and persons in them fit for the scene and action: warriors and kings, princes and nobles, and greater yet, poets and philosophers: and mightier than these, patriarchs and apostles, prophets and founders of religion, saints and martyrs, angels and the Son of God. We know their importance and their high calling, and we feel that they do not belie it. We see them as they were painted, with the eye of faith. The light which they have kindled in the world is reflected back upon their faces; the awe and homage which has been paid to them is seated upon their brow, and encircles them like a glory. All those who come before them are conscious of a superior presence. For example, the beggars, in the Gate Beautiful, are impressed with this ideal borrowed character. Would not the cripple and the halt feel a difference of sensation, and express it outwardly in such circumstances? And was the painter wrong to transfer this sense of preternatural power and the confidence of a saving faith to his canvas? Hogarth's Pool of Bethesda, on the contrary, is only a collection of common beggars receiving an alms. The waters may be stirred, but the mind is not stirred with them. The fowls, again, in the Miraculous Draught of Fishes, exult and

clap their wings, and seem lifted up with some unusual cause of joy. There is not the same expansive, elevated principle in Hogarth. He has amiable and praiseworthy characters, indeed, among his bad ones. The Master of the Industrious and Idle Apprentice is a good citizen and a virtuous man; but his benevolence is mechanical and confined: it extends only to his shop, or at most to his ward. His face is not ruffled by passion, nor is it inspired by thought. To give another instance, the face of the faithful Female, fainting in the prison scene in the Rake's Progress, is more one of effeminate softness than of disinterested tenderness or heroic constancy. But in the pictures of the Mother and Child by Raphael and Leonardo Da Vinci, we see all the tenderness purified from all the weakness of maternal affection, and exalted by the prospects of religious faith; so that the piety and devotion of future generations seems to add its weight to the expression of feminine sweetness and parental love, to press upon the heart and breathe in the countenance. This is the *ideal*, passion blended with thought and pointing to distant objects, not debased by grossness, not thwarted by accident, not weakened by familiarity, but connected with forms and circumstances that give the utmost possible expansion and refinement to the general sentiment. With all my admiration of Hogarth, I cannot think him equal to Raphael. I do not know whether, if the portfolio were opened, I would not as soon look over the prints of Hogarth as those of Raphael; but, assuredly, if the question were put to me, I would sooner never have seen the prints of Hogarth, than never have seen those of Raphael. It is many years ago since I first saw the prints of the Cartoons hanging round the old-fashioned parlour of a little inn in a remote part of the country.* I was then young: I had heard of the fame of the Cartoons, but

* Apparently about 1798, at St. Neot's, Huntingdonshire. See 'Memoirs of W. Hazlitt,' 1867, i. 71.—Ed.

this was the first time I had ever been admitted face to face into the presence of those divine guests. "How was I then uplifted!" Prophets and Apostles stood before me as in a dream, and the Saviour of the Christian world, with his attributes of faith and power; miracles were working on the walls; the hand of Raphael was there; and as his pencil traced the lines, I saw godlike spirits and lofty shapes descend and walk visibly the earth, but as if their thoughts still lifted them above the earth. There I saw the figure of St. Paul, pointing with noble fervour to "temples not made with hands, eternal in the heavens;" and that finer one of Christ in the boat, whose whole figure seems sustained by meekness and love; and that of the same person surrounded by his disciples, like a flock of sheep listening to the music of some divine shepherd. I knew not how enough to admire them.—Later in life,* I saw other works of this great painter (with more like them) collected in the Louvre: where Art, at that time, lifted up her head, and was seated on her throne, and said, "All eyes shall see me, and all knees shall bow to me!" Honour was done to her and all hers. There was her treasure, and there the inventory of all she had. There she had gathered together her pomp, and there was her shrine, and there her votaries came and worshipped as in a temple. The crown she wore was brighter than that of kings. Where the struggles for human liberty had been, there were the triumphs of human genius. For there, in the Louvre, were the precious monuments of art: there "stood the statue that enchants the world;" there was Apollo, the Laocoon, the Dying Gladiator, the head of the Antinous, Diana with her Fawn, the Muses and the Graces in a ring, and all the glories of the antique world:—

> "There was old Proteus coming from the sea,
> And wreathed Triton blew his winding horn."

* In 1802. See 'Memoirs of W. Hazlitt,' 1867, i. 84, *et seq.*—Ed.

There, too, were the two St. Jeromes, Correggio's and Domenichino's; there was Raphael's Transfiguration; the St. Mark of Tintoret; Paul Veronese's Marriage of Cana; the Deluge of Poussin; and Titian's St. Peter Martyr. It was there that I learned to become an enthusiast of the lasting works of the great painters, and of their names no less magnificent; grateful to the heart at * the sound of celestial harmony from other spheres, waking around us (whether heard or not) from youth to age; the stay, the guide, and anchor of our purest thoughts; whom, having once seen, we always remember, and who teach us to see all things through them; without whom life would be to begin again, and the earth barren; of Raphael, who lifted the human form half way to heaven; of Titian, who painted the mind in the face, and unfolded the soul of things to the eye; of Rubens, around whose pencil gorgeous shapes thronged numberless, startling us by the novel accidents of form and colour, putting the spirit of motion into the universe, and weaving a gay fantastic round and Bacchanalian dance with nature; of Rembrandt, too, who "smoothed the raven down of darkness till it smiled," and tinged it with a light like streaks of burnished ore; of these, and more than these, of whom the world was scarce worthy, and for the loss of whom nothing could console me — not even the works of Hogarth!

* Original edition has *as*.—Ed.

LECTURE VIII.

ON THE COMIC WRITERS OF THE LAST CENTURY.

THE question which has been often asked, *Why there are comparatively so few good modern Comedies?* appears in a great measure to answer itself. It is because so many excellent comedies have been written, that there are none written at present. Comedy naturally wears itself out, destroys the very food on which it lives; and by constantly and successfully exposing the follies and weaknesses of mankind to ridicule, in the end leaves itself nothing worth laughing at. It holds the mirror up to nature; and men, seeing their most striking peculiarities and defects pass in gay review before them, learn either to avoid or conceal them. It is not the criticism which the public taste exercises upon the stage, but the criticism which the stage exercises upon public manners, that is fatal to comedy, by rendering the subject-matter of it tame, correct, and spiritless. We are drilled into a sort of stupid decorum, and forced to wear the same dull uniform of outward appearance; and yet it is asked, why the Comic Muse does not point, as she was wont, at the peculiarities of our gait and gesture, and exhibit the picturesque contrasts of our dress and costume in all that graceful variety in which she delights. The genuine source of comic writing,

"Where it must live, or have no life at all,"

is undoubtedly to be found in the distinguishing peculiarities of men and manners. Now this distinction can subsist, so as to be strong, pointed, and general, only

while the manners of different classes are formed almost immediately by their particular circumstances, and the characters of individuals by their natural temperament and situation, without being everlastingly modified and neutralized by intercourse with the world—by knowledge and education. In a certain stage of society, men may be said to vegetate like trees, and to become rooted to the soil in which they grow. They have no idea of anything beyond themselves and their immediate sphere of action; they are, as it were, circumscribed and defined by their particular circumstances they are what their situation makes them, and nothing more. Each is absorbed in his own profession or pursuit, and each in his turn contracts that habitual peculiarity of manners and opinions which makes him the subject of ridicule to others, and the sport of the Comic Muse. Thus the physician is nothing but a physician, the lawyer is a mere lawyer, the scholar degenerates into a pedant, the country squire is a different species of being from the fine gentleman, the citizen and the courtier inhabit a different world, and even the affectation of certain characters, in aping the follies or vices of their betters, only serves to show the immeasurable distance which custom or fortune has placed between them. Hence the earlier comic writers, taking advantage of this mixed and solid mass of ignorance, folly, pride, and prejudice, made those deep and lasting incisions into it, have given those sharp and nice touches, that bold relief to their characters, have opposed them in every variety of contrast and collision, of conscious self-satisfaction and mutual antipathy, with a power that can only find full scope in the same rich and inexhaustible materials. But in proportion as comic genius succeeds in taking off the mask from ignorance and conceit, as it teaches us

"To see ourselves as others see us,—"

in proportion as we are brought out on the stage together,

and our prejudices clash one against the other, our sharp angular points wear off; we are no longer rigid in absurdity, passionate in folly; and we prevent the ridicule directed at our habitual foibles by laughing at them ourselves.

If it be said, that there is the same fund of absurdity and prejudice in the world as ever, that there are the same unaccountable perversities lurking at the bottom of every breast, I should answer, Be it so: but at least we keep our follies to ourselves as much as possible; we palliate, shuffle, and equivocate with them; they sneak into bye-corners, and do not, like Chaucer's *Canterbury Pilgrims*, march along the high road, and form a procession; they do not entrench themselves strongly behind custom and precedent; they are not embodied in professions and ranks in life; they are not organised into a system; they do not openly resort to a standard, but are a sort of straggling nondescripts that, like *Wart*, "present no mark to the foeman." As to the gross and palpable absurdities of modern manners, they are too shallow and barefaced, and those who affect are too little *serious* in them, to make them worth the detection of the Comic Muse. They proceed from an idle, impudent affectation of folly in general in the dashing *bravura* style, not from an infatuation with any of its characteristic modes. In short, the proper object of ridicule is *egotism:* and a man cannot be a very great egotist, who every day sees himself represented on the stage. We are deficient in comedy, because we are without characters in real life: as we have no historical pictures, because we have no faces proper for them.

It is, indeed, the evident tendency of all literature to generalise and *dissipate* character, by giving men the same artificial education and the same common stock of ideas: so that we see all objects from the same point of view and through the same reflected medium. We learn to exist,

not in ourselves, but in books; all men become alike mere readers: spectators, not actors in the scene, and lose their proper personal identity. The templar, the wit, the man of pleasure, and the man of fashion, the courtier and the citizen, the knight and the squire, the lover and the miser—*Lovelace*, *Lothario*, *Will Honeycomb*, and *Sir Roger de Coverley*, *Sparkish* and *Lord Foppington*, *Western* and *Tom Jones*, *My Father* and *My Uncle Toby*, *Millamant* and *Sir Sampson Legend*, *Don Quixote* and *Sancho*, *Gil Blas* and *Guzman d'Alfarache*, *Count Fathom* and *Joseph Surface*: have met and exchanged commonplaces on the barren plains of the *haute littérature*: toil slowly on to the temple of science, "seen a long way off upon a level," and end in one dull compound of politics, criticism, chemistry, and metaphysics!

We cannot expect to reconcile opposite things. If, for example, any of us were to put ourselves into the stage-coach from Salisbury to London, it is more than probable we should not meet with the same number of odd accidents or ludicrous distresses on the road, that befel *Parson Adams*; but why, if we get into a common vehicle, and submit to the conveniences of modern travelling, should we complain of the want of adventures? Modern manners may be compared to a modern stage-coach; our limbs may be a little cramped with the confinement, and we may grow drowsy, but we arrive safe, without any very amusing or very sad accident, at our journey's end.

In this theory I have, at least, the authority of Sterne and the Tatler on my side, who attribute the greater variety and richness of comic excellence in our writers, to the greater variety and distinctness of character among ourselves, the roughness of the texture and the sharp angles not being worn out by the artificial refinements of intellect, or the frequent collision of social intercourse. It has been argued on the other hand, indeed, that this circumstance makes against me: that the suppression of the

grosser indications of absurdity ought to stimulate and give scope to the ingenuity and penetration of the comic writer who is to detect them; and that the progress of wit and humour ought to keep pace with critical distinctions and metaphysical niceties. Some theorists, indeed, have been sanguine enough to expect a regular advance from grossness to refinement on the stage and in real life, marked on a graduated scale of human perfectibility, and have been hence led to imagine that the best of our old comedies were no better than the coarse jests of a set of country clowns—a sort of *comedies bourgeoises*, compared with the admirable productions which might, but have not, been written in our times. I must protest against this theory altogether, which would go to degrade genteel comedy from a high court lady into a literary prostitute. I do not know what these persons mean by refinement in this instance. Do they find none in Millamant and her morning dreams, in Sir Roger de Coverley and his widow? Did not Etherege, Wycherley, and Congreve, approach tolerably near

> "—— the ring
> Of mimic statesmen and their merry king?"

Is there no distinction between an Angelica and a Miss Prue: a Valentine, a Tattle, and a Ben? Where, in the annals of modern literature, shall we find anything more refined, more deliberate, more abstracted in vice, than the nobleman in Amelia? Are not the compliments which Pope paid to his friends equal in taste and elegance to any which have been paid since? Are there no traits in Sterne? Is not Richardson minute enough? Must we part with Sophia Western and her muff, and Clarissa Harlowe's "preferable regards" for the loves of the plants and the triangles? Or shall we say that the Berinthias and Alitheas of former times were little rustics, because they did not, like our modern belles, subscribe to circu-

lating libraries, read 'Beppo,' prefer 'Gertrude of Wyoming' to the 'Lady of the Lake,' or the 'Lady of the Lake' to 'Gertrude of Wyoming,' differ in their sentiments on points of taste or systems of mineralogy, and deliver dissertations on the arts with Corinna of Italy? They had something else to do and to talk about. They were employed in reality, as we see them on the stage, in setting off their charms to the greatest advantage, in mortifying their rivals by the most pointed irony, and trifling with their lovers with infinite address. The height of comic elegance and refinement is not to be found in the general diffusion of knowledge and civilization, which tends to level and neutralise, but in the pride of individual distinction, and the contrast between the conflicting pretensions of different ranks in society.

For this reason I conceive that the alterations, which have taken place in conversation and dress, in consequence of the change of manners in the same period, have been by no means favourable to comedy. The present prevailing style of conversation is not *personal*, but critical and analytical. It consists almost entirely in the discussion of general topics, in ascertaining the merits of authors and their works: and Congreve would be able to derive no better hints from the conversations of our toilettes or drawing-rooms for the exquisite raillery or poignant repartee of his dialogues than from a deliberation of the Royal Society. In manner, the extreme simplicity and graceful uniformity of modern dress, however favourable to the arts, has certainly stript comedy of one of its richest ornaments and most expressive symbols. The sweeping pall and buskin, and nodding plume, were never more serviceable to tragedy, than the enormous hoops and stiff stays worn by the belles of former days were to the intrigues of comedy. They assisted wonderfully in heightening the mysteries of the passion, and adding to the intricacy of the plot. Wycherley and Vanbrugh could

not have spared the dresses of Vandyke. These strange, fancy dresses, perverse disguises, and counterfeit shapes, gave an agreeable scope to the imagination. "That sevenfold fence" was a sort of foil to the lusciousness of the dialogue, and a barrier against the sly encroachments of *double entendre.* The greedy eye and bold hand of indiscretion were repressed, which gave a greater license to the tongue. The senses were not to be gratified in an instant. Love was entangled in the folds of the swelling handkerchief, and the desires might wander for ever round the circumference of a quilted petticoat, or find a rich lodging in the flowers of a damask stomacher. There was room for years of patient contrivance, for a thousand thoughts, schemes, conjectures, hopes, fears, and wishes. There seemed no end of obstacles and delays; to overcome so many difficulties was the work of ages. A mistress was an angel, concealed behind whalebone, flounces, and brocade. What an undertaking to penetrate through the disguise! What an impulse must it give to the blood, what a keenness to the invention, what a volubility to the tongue! "Mr. Smirk, you are a brisk man," was then the most significant commendation; but now-a-days—a woman can be *but undressed!* Again, the character of the fine gentleman is at present a little obscured on the stage, nor do we immediately recognize it elsewhere, for want of the formidable *insignia* of a bag-wig and sword. Without these outward credentials, the public must not only be unable to distinguish this character intuitively, but it must be "almost afraid to know itself." The present simple disguise of a gentleman is like the *incognito* of kings. The opinion of others affects our opinion of ourselves; and we can hardly expect from a modern man of fashion that air of dignity and superior gracefulness of carriage, which those must have assumed who were conscious that all eyes were upon them, and that their lofty pretensions continually exposed them either to public

scorn or challenged public admiration. A lord who should take the wall of the plebeian passengers without a sword by his side would hardly have his claim of precedence acknowledged; nor could he be supposed to have that obsolete air of self-importance about him, which should alone clear the pavement at his approach. It is curious how an ingenious actor of the present day (Mr. Farren) should play Lord Ogleby* so well as he does, having never seen anything of the sort in reality. A nobleman in full costume, and in broad day, would be a phenomenon like the lord mayor's coach. The attempt at getting up genteel comedy at present is a sort of galvanic experiment, a revival of the dead.†

* A character in Garrick and Colman's comedy of 'The Clandestine Marriage." The Farren here mentioned was the late Mr. W. Farren of the Haymarket.—Ed.

† I have only to add, by way of explanation on this subject, the following passage from the 'Characters of Shakspeare's Plays:' "There is a certain stage of society in which people become conscious of their peculiarities and absurdities, affect to disguise what they are, and set up pretensions to what they are not. This gives rise to a corresponding style of comedy, the object of which is to detect the disguises of self-love, and to make reprisals on these preposterous assumptions of vanity, by marking the contrast between the real and the affected character as severely as possible, and denying to those who would impose on us for what they are not, even the merit which they have. This is the comedy of artificial life, of wit and satire, such as we see it in Congreve, Wycherley, Vanbrugh, &c. To this succeeds a state of society from which the same sort of affectation and pretence are banished by a greater knowledge of the world, or by their successful exposure on the stage; and which by neutralizing the materials of comic character, both natural and artificial, leaves no comedy at all—but *the sentimental*. Such is our modern comedy. There is a period in the progress of manners anterior to both these, in which the foibles and follies of individuals are of nature's planting, not the growth of art or study; in which they are therefore unconscious of them themselves, or care not who knows them, if they can but have their whim out; and in which, as there is no attempt at imposition, the spectators rather receive pleasure from humouring the inclinations of

I have observed in a former Lecture, that the most spirited era of our comic drama was that which reflected the conversation, tone, and manners of the profligate, but witty age of Charles II. With the graver and more business-like turn which the Revolution probably gave to our minds, comedy stooped from her bolder and more fantastic flights; and the ferocious attack made by the nonjuring divine, Jeremy Collier, on the immorality and profaneness of the plays then chiefly in vogue, nearly frightened those unwarrantable liberties of wit and humour from the stage, which were no longer countenanced at court nor copied in the city. Almost the last of our writers who ventured to hold out in the prohibited track, was a female adventurer, Mrs. Centlivre, who seemed to take advantage of the privilege of her sex, and to set at defiance the cynical denunciations of the angry puritanical reformist. Her plays have a provoking spirit and volatile salt in them, which still preserves them from decay. Congreve is said to have been jealous of their success at the time, and that it was one cause which drove him in disgust from the stage. If so, it was without any good reason: for these plays have great and intrinsic merit in them, which entitled them to their popularity (and it is only spurious and undeserved popularity which should excite a feeling of jealousy in any well-regulated mind): and besides, their merit was of a kind entirely different from his own. The 'Wonder' and the 'Busy Body' are properly comedies of intrigue. Their interest depends chiefly on the intricate involution and artful *denouément* of the plot, which has a strong tincture of mischief in it, and the wit is seasoned by the archness of the humour and sly allusion to the most delicate points. They are plays evidently written by a very clever woman, but still by a

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the persons they laugh at, than wish to give them pain by exposing their absurdity. This may be called the comedy of nature, and it is the comedy which we generally find in Shakspeare." P. 256.

woman: for I hold, in spite of any fanciful theories to the contrary, that there is a distinction discernible in the minds of women as well as in their faces. The "Wonder" is one of the best of our acting plays. The passion of jealousy in Don Felix is managed in such a way as to give as little offence as possible to the audience, for every appearance combines to excite and confirm his worst suspicions, while we, who are in the secret, laugh at his groundless uneasiness and apprehensions. The ambiguity of the heroine's situation, which is like a continued practical *equivoque*, gives rise to a quick succession of causeless alarms, subtle excuses, and the most hairbreadth 'scapes. The scene near the end, in which Don Felix, pretending to be drunk, forces his way out of Don Manuel's house, who wants to keep him a prisoner by producing his marriage contract in the shape of a pocket-pistol, with the terrors and confusion into which the old gentleman is thrown by this sort of *argumentum ad hominem*, is one of the richest treats the stage affords, and calls forth incessant peals of laughter and applause. Besides the two principal characters (Violante and Don Felix), Lissardo and Flippanta come in very well to carry on the underplot; and the airs and graces of an amorous waiting-maid and conceited man-servant, each copying after their master and mistress, were never hit off with more natural volubility or affected *nonchalance* than in this enviable couple. Lissardo's playing off the diamond ring before the eyes of his mortified Dulcinea, and aping his master's absent manner while repeating—"Roast me these, Violante," as well as the jealous quarrel of the two waiting-maids, which threatens to end in some very extraordinary discoveries, are among the most amusing traits in this comedy. Colonel Breton, the lover of Clara, is a spirited and enterprising soldier of fortune; and his servant Gibby's undaunted, incorrigible blundering, with a dash of nationality in it, tells in a very edifying way. The 'Busy

Body' is inferior, in the interest of the story and characters, to the 'Wonder;' but it is full of bustle and gaiety from beginning to end. The plot never stands still; the situations succeed one another like the changes of machinery in a pantomime. The nice dovetailing of the incidents and cross-reading in the situations supply * the place of any great force of wit or sentiment. The time for the entrance of each person on the stage is the moment when they are least wanted, and when their arrival makes either themselves or somebody else look as foolish as possible. The laughableness of this comedy, as well as of the 'Wonder,' depends on a brilliant series of mistimed exits and entrances. Marplot is the whimsical hero of the piece, and a standing memorial of unmeaning vivacity and assiduous impertinence.

The comedies of Steele were the first that were written expressly with a view not to imitate the manners, but to reform the morals of the age. The author seems to be all the time on his good behaviour, as if writing a comedy was no very creditable employment, and as if the ultimate object of his ambition was a dedication to the queen. Nothing can be better meant, or more inefficient. It is almost a misnomer to call them comedies; they are rather homilies in dialogue, in which a number of very pretty ladies and gentlemen discuss the fashionable topics of gaming, of duelling, of seduction, of scandal, &c., with a sickly sensibility, that shows as little hearty aversion to vice as sincere attachment to virtue. By not meeting the question fairly on the ground of common experience, by slubbering over the objections, and varnishing over the answers, the whole distinction between virtue and vice (as it appears in evidence in the comic drama) is reduced to verbal professions, and a mechanical, infantine goodness. The sting is, indeed, taken out of what is bad; but what is good, at the same time, loses its manhood and nobility

* Original edition reads *supplies*.—Ed.

of nature by this enervating process. I am unwilling to believe that the only difference between right and wrong is mere cant or *make-believe;* and I imagine that the advantage which the moral drama possesses over mere theoretical precept or general declamation is this, that by being left free to imitate nature as it is, and not being referred to an ideal standard, it is its own voucher for the truth of the inferences it draws, for its warnings, or its examples; that it brings out the higher, as well as lower principles of action, in the most striking and convincing points of view, satisfies us that virtue is not a mere shadow, clothes it with passion, imagination, reality and, if I may so say, translates morality from the language of theory into that of practice. But Steele, by introducing the artificial mechanism of morals on the stage, and making his characters act, not from individual motives and existing circumstances the truth of which every one must feel, but from vague topics and general rules the truth of which is the very thing to be proved in detail, has lost that fine 'vantage-ground which the stage lends to virtue, takes away from it its best grace, the grace of sincerity, and instead of making it a test of truth, has made it an echo of the doctrine of the schools—and "the one cries *Mum*, while t'other cries *Budget!*"* The comic writer, in my judgment then, ought to open the volume of nature and the world for his living materials, and not take them out of his ethical commonplace book; for in this way neither will throw any additional light upon the other. In all things there is a division of labour; and I am as little for introducing the tone of the pulpit or reading-desk on the stage, as for introducing plays and interludes in church-time, according to the good old popish practice. It was a part, indeed, of Steele's plan, "by the politeness of his style and the genteelness of his expres-

* 'Merry Wives of Windsor,' v. 5.—Ed.

sions,"* to bring about a reconciliation between things which he thought had hitherto been kept too far asunder, to wed the graces to the virtues, and blend pleasure with profit. And in this design he succeeded admirably in his 'Tatler,' and some other works; but in his comedies he has failed. He has confounded, instead of harmonising, has taken away its gravity from wisdom and its charm from gaiety. It is not that in his plays we find "some soul of goodness in things evil;" but they have no soul either of good or bad. His 'Funeral' is as trite, as tedious, and full of formal grimace, as a procession of mutes and undertakers. The characters are made either affectedly good and forbearing, with "all the milk of human kindness;" or purposely bad and disgusting, for the others to exercise their squeamish charities upon them. The 'Conscious Lovers' is the best; but that is far from good, with the exception of the scene between Mr. Thomas and Phillis who are fellow-servants, and commence lovers from being set to clean the window together. We are here once more in the company of our old friend, Isaac Bickerstaff, Esq. Indiana is as listless and as insipid as a drooping figure on an Indian screen; and Mr. Myrtle and Mr. Bevil only just disturb the still life of the scene. I am sorry that in this censure I should have Parson Adams against me, who thought the 'Conscious Lovers' the only play fit for a Christian to see, and as good as a sermon. For myself, I would rather have read, or heard him read, one of his own manuscript sermons: and if the volume which he left behind him in his saddle-bags was to be had in print, for love or money, I would at any time walk ten miles on foot only to get a sight of it.

Addison's 'Drummer, or the Haunted House,' is a pleasant farce enough, but adds nothing to our idea of the author of the 'Spectator.'

Pope's joint afterpiece, called 'An Hour after Marriage,' was not a successful attempt. He brought into it "an

* See Mandeville's 'Fable of the Bees.'

alligator stuff'd," which disconcerted the ladies, and gave just offence to the critics. Pope was too fastidious for a farce-writer; and yet the most fastidious people, when they step out of their regular routine, are apt to become the grossest. The smallest offences against probability or decorum are, to their habitual scrupulousness, as unpardonable as the greatest. This was the rock on which Pope probably split. The affair was, however, hushed up; and he wreaked his discreet vengeance at leisure on the "odious endeavours" and more odious success of Colley Cibber in the line in which he had failed.

Gay's 'What-d'ye-call-it' is not one of his happiest things. His 'Polly' is a complete failure, which indeed is the common fate of second parts. If the original Polly, in the 'Beggar's Opera,' had not had more winning ways with her, she would hardly have had so many Countesses for representatives as she has had, from her first appearance up to the present moment.

Fielding was a comic writer, as well as a novelist; but his comedies are very inferior to his novels: they are particularly deficient both in plot and character. The only excellence which they have is that of the style, which is the only thing in which his novels are deficient. The only dramatic pieces of Fielding that retain possession of the stage are, the 'Mock Doctor' (a tolerable translation from Molière's *Medecin malgrè lui*), and his 'Tom Thumb,' a very admirable piece of burlesque. The absurdities and bathos of some of our celebrated tragic writers could hardly be credited, but for the notes at the bottom of this preposterous medley of bombast, containing his authorities and the parallel passages. Dryden, Lee and Shadwell make no very shining figure there. Mr. Liston makes a better figure in the text. His Lord Grizzle is prodigious. What a name, and what a person! It has been said of this ingenious actor, that "he is very great in Liston;" but he is even greater in Lord Grizzle. What a wig is that he wears! How flighty, flaunting, and fantastical!

Not "like those hanging locks of young Apollo," nor like the serpent-hair of the Furies of Æschylus; but as troublous, though not as tragical as the one—as imposing, though less classical than the other. "*Que terribles sont ces cheveux gris*," might be applied to Lord Grizzle's most valiant and magnanimous curls. This sapient courtier's "fell of hair does at a dismal treatise rouse and stir as life were in't." His wits seem flying away with the disorder of his flowing locks, and to sit as loosely on our hero's head as the caul of his peruke. What a significant vacancy in his open eyes and mouth! what a listlessness in his limbs! what an abstraction of all thought or purpose! With what an headlong impulse of enthusiasm he throws himself across the stage when he is going to be married, crying, "Hey for Doctors' Commons," as if the genius of folly had taken whole-length possession of his person! And then his dancing is equal to the discovery of a sixth sense—which is certainly very different from *common sense!* If this extraordinary personage cuts a great figure in his life, he is no less wonderful in his death and burial. "From the sublime to the ridiculous there is but one step;" and this character would almost seem to prove, that there is but one step from the ridiculous to the sublime. Lubin Log, however inimitable in itself, is itself an imitation of something existing elsewhere; but the Lord Grizzle of this truly original actor is a pure invention of his own. His Caper, in the 'Widow's Choice,' can alone dispute the palm with it in incoherence and volatility; for that, too, "is high fantastical," almost as full of emptiness, in as grand a gusto of insipidity, as profoundly absurd, as elaborately nonsensical! Why does not Mr. Liston play in some of Molière's farces? I heartily wish that the author of 'Love, Law, and Physic,'* would launch him on the London boards

* James Kenney. First performed at Covent Garden, Nov. 20, 1812.—Ed.

in Monsieur Jourdain, or Monsieur Pourceaugnac. The genius of Liston and Molière together—

"—— Must bid a gay defiance to mischance."

Mr. Liston is an actor hardly belonging to the present age. Had he lived, unfortunately for us, in the time of Colley Cibber, we should have seen what a splendid niche he would have given him in his 'Apology.'

Cibber is the hero of the 'Dunciad;' but it cannot be said of him, that he was "by merit raised to that bad eminence." He was pert, not dull; a coxcomb, not a blockhead; vain, but not malicious. Pope's unqualified abuse of him was mere spleen: and the most obvious provocation to it seems to have been an excess of flippant vivacity in the constitution of Cibber. That Cibber's 'Birthday Odes' were dull, is true; but this was not peculiar to him. It is an objection which may be made equally to Shadwell's, to Whitehead's, to Warton's, to Pye's, and to all others, except those which of late years have *not* been written! In his 'Apology for his own Life,' Cibber is a most amusing biographer: happy in his own good opinion, the best of all others; teeming with animal spirits, and uniting the self-sufficiency of youth with the garrulity of age. His account of his waiting as a page behind the chair of the old Duchess of Malborough, at the time of the Revolution, who was then in the bloom of youth and beauty, which seems to have called up in him the secret homage of "distant, enthusiastic, respectful love," fifty years after, and the compliment he pays to her (then in her old age), "a great-grandmother without grey hairs," is as delightful as anything in fiction or romance, and is the evident origin of Mr. Burke's celebrated apostrophe to the Queen of France.* Nor is the political confession of faith which he makes on this occasion without a suitable mixture of vanity and sincerity: the vanity we may ascribe to the player, the sincerity to the

* This was probably meant only half in earnest.—Ed.

politician. The self-complacency with which he talks of his own success, both as a player and a writer, is not greater than the candour and cordiality with which he does heaped justice to the merits of his theatrical contemporaries and predecessors. He brings down the history of the stage, either by the help of observation or tradition, from the time of Shakspeare to his own; and quite dazzles the reader with a constellation of male and female, of tragic and comic, of past and present excellence. He gives portraits at full length of Kynaston, of Betterton, of Booth, of Estcourt, of Penkethman and Dogget, of Mohun and Wilks, of Nokes and Sandford, of Mrs. Montford, of Mrs. Oldfield, of Mrs. Barry and Mrs. Bracegirdle, and of others of equal note; with delectable criticisms on their several performances, and anecdotes of their private lives, with scarcely a single particle of jealousy or ill-nature, or any other motive than to expatiate in the delight of talking of the ornaments of his art, and a wish to share his pleasure with the reader. I wish I could quote some of these theatrical sketches; but the time presses. The latter part of his work is less entertaining when he becomes Manager, and gives us an exact statement of his squabbles with the Lord Chamberlain, and the expense of his ground-rent, his repairs, his scenery, and his dresses. In his plays, his personal character perhaps predominates too much over the inventiveness of his Muse; but so far from being dull, he is everywhere light, fluttering, and airy. His pleasure in himself made him desirous to please; but his fault was, that he was too soon satisfied with what he did, that his indolence or want of thought led him to indulge in the vein that flowed from him with most ease, and that his vanity did not allow him to distinguish between what he did best and worst. His 'Careless Husband' is a very elegant piece of agreeable, thoughtless writing; and the incident of Lady Easy throwing her handkerchief over her husband, whom she finds asleep in

a chair by the side of her waiting-woman, was an admirable contrivance, taken, as he informs us, from real life. His 'Double Gallant,' which has been lately revived, though it cannot rank in the first, may take its place in the second or third class of comedies. It abounds in character, bustle, and stage effect. It belongs to what may be called the composite style; and very happily mixes up the comedy of intrigue, such as we see it in Mrs. Centlivre's Spanish plots, with a tolerable share of the wit and spirit of Congreve and Vanbrugh. As there is a good deal of wit, there is a spice of wickedness in this play, which was a privilege of the good old style of comedy not altogether abandoned in Cibber's time. The luscious vein of the dialogue is stopped short in many of the scenes of the revived play, though not before we perceive its object—

> "—— In hidden mazes running,
> With wanton haste and giddy cunning."

These imperfect hints of double meanings, however, pass off without any marks of reprobation; for unless they are insisted on, or made pretty broad, the audience, from being accustomed to the cautious purity of the modern drama, are not very expert in deciphering the equivocal allusion, for which they are not on the look-out. To what is this increased nicety owing? Was it that vice, from being formerly less common (though more fashionable) was less catching than at present? The first inference is by no means in our favour: for though I think that the grossness of manners prevailing in our fashionable comedies was a direct transcript of the manners of the court at the time, or in the period immediately preceding, yet the same grossness of expression and allusion existed long before, as in the plays of Shakspeare and Ben Jonson, when there was not this grossness of manners, and it has of late years been gradually refining away. There is a certain grossness or freedom of expression, which may

arise as often from unsuspecting simplicity as from avowed profligacy. Whatever may be our progress either in virtue or vice since the age of Charles II., certain it is, that our manners are not mended since the time of Elizabeth and Charles I. Is it, then, that vice was formerly a thing more to be wondered at than imitated? that behind the rigid barriers of religion and morality it might be exposed freely, without the danger of any serious practical consequences: whereas now that the safeguards of wholesome authority and prejudice are removed, we seem afraid to trust our eyes or ears with a single situation or expression of a loose tendency, as if the mere mention of licentiousness implied a conscious approbation of it, and the extreme delicacy of our moral sense would be debauched by the bare suggestion of the possibility of vice? But I shall not take upon me to answer this question. The characters in the 'Double Gallant' are well kept up: At-All and Lady Dainty are the two most prominent characters in this comedy, and those into which Cibber has put most of his own nature and genius. They are the essence of active impertinence and fashionable frivolity. Cibber, in short, though his name has been handed down to us as a bye-word of impudent pretension and impenetrable dulness by the classical pen of his accomplished rival,* who, unfortunately, did not admit of any merit beyond the narrow circle of wit and friendship in which he himself moved, was a gentleman and a scholar of the old school; a man of wit and pleasantry in conversation, a diverting mimic, an excellent actor, an admirable dramatic critic, and one of the best comic writers of his age. His works, instead of being a *caput mortuum* of literature, had a great deal of the spirit with a little too much of the froth. His 'Nonjuror' was taken from Molière's 'Tartuffe,' and has been altered to the 'Hypocrite.' 'Love's Last Shift' appears to have been

* Pope.—Ed.

his own favourite; and he received the compliments of Sir John Vanbrugh and old Mr. Southern upon it. The latter said to him, "Young man, your play is a good one; and it will succeed, if you do not spoil it by your acting." His plays did not always take equally. It is ludicrous to hear him complaining of the ill success of one of them, 'Love in a Riddle,' a pastoral comedy, "of a nice morality," and well-spoken sentiments, which he wrote in opposition to the 'Beggar's Opera,' at the time when its worthless and vulgar rival was carrying everything triumphantly before it. Cibber brings this with much pathetic *naïveté*, as an instance of the lamentable want of taste in the town!

The 'Suspicious Husband' by Hoadley, the 'Jealous Wife' by Colman, and the 'Clandestine Marriage' by Colman and Garrick, are excellent plays of the middle style of comedy: which are formed rather by judgment and selection, than by any original vein of genius; and have all the parts of a good comedy in degree, without having any one prominent or to excess. The character of Ranger, in the 'Suspicious Husband,' is only a variation of those of Farquhar, of the same class as his Sir Harry Wildair and others, without equal spirit. A great deal of the story of the 'Jealous Wife' is borrowed from Fielding, but so faintly, that the resemblance is hardly discernible till you are apprised of it. The 'Jealous Wife' herself is, however, a dramatic *chef-d'œuvre*, and worthy of being acted as often and better than it is. Sir Harry Beagle is a true fox-hunting English squire. The 'Clandestine Marriage' is nearly without a fault; and has some lighter theatrical graces, which I suspect Garrick threw into it. *Canton* is, I should think, his; though this classification of him among the ornamental parts of the play may seem whimsical. Garrick's genius does not appear to have been equal to the construction of a solid drama; but he could retouch

and embellish with great gaiety and knowledge of the technicalities of his art. Garrick not only produced joint-pieces and after-pieces, but often set off the plays of his friends and contemporaries with the garnish, the *sauce piquante*, of prologues and epilogues, at which he had an admirable knack. The elder Colman's translation of 'Terence,' I may here add, has always been considered by good judges as an equal proof of the author's knowledge of the Latin language and taste in his own.

Bickerstaff's plays and comic operas are continually acted: they come under the class of mediocrity, generally speaking. Their popularity seems to be chiefly owing to the unaffected ease and want of pretension with which they are written, with a certain humorous *naïveté* in the lower characters, and an exquisite adaptation of the music to the songs. His 'Love in a Village' is one of the most delightful comic operas on the stage. It is truly pastoral; and the sense of music hovers over the very scene like the breath of morning. In his alteration of the 'Tartuffe' he has spoiled the Hypocrite, but he has added Mawworm.

Mrs. Cowley's comedy of the 'Belles' Stratagem,' 'Who's the Dupe,' and others, are of the second or third class: they are rather *rifacimenti* of the characters, incidents and materials of former writers, got up with considerable liveliness and ingenuity, than original compositions with marked qualities of their own.

Goldsmith's 'Good-natured Man' is inferior to 'She Stoops to Conquer, and even this last play, with all its shifting vivacity, is rather a sportive and whimsical effusion of the author's fancy, a delightful and delicately managed caricature, than a genuine comedy.

Murphy's plays of 'All in the Wrong' and 'Know Your Own Mind,' are admirably written, with sense, spirit and conception of character; but without any great effect of the humorous, or that truth of feeling which

distinguishes the boundary between the absurdities of natural character and the gratuitous fictions of the poet's pen. The heroes of these two plays, Millamour and Sir Benjamin Constant, are too ridiculous in their caprices to be tolerated, except in farce; and yet their follies are so flimsy, so motiveless, and finespun, as not to be intelligible, or to have any effect in their only proper sphere. Both his principal pieces are said to have suffered by their similarity, first to 'Colman's Jealous Wife,' and next to the 'School for Scandal,' though in both cases he had the undoubted priority. It is hard that the fate of plagiarism should attend upon originality, yet it is clear that the elements of the 'School for Scandal' are not sparingly scattered in Murphy's comedy of 'Know your own Mind,' which appeared before the latter play, only to be eclipsed by it. This brings me to speak of Sheridan.

Mr. Sheridan has been justly called "a dramatic star of the first magnitude;" and indeed, among the comic writers of the last century, he "shines like Hesperus among the lesser lights." He has left four several dramas behind him, all different or of different kinds, and all excellent in their way; the 'School for Scandal,' the 'Rivals,' the 'Duenna,' and the 'Critic.' The attraction of this last piece is, however, less in the mock tragedy rehearsed, than in the dialogue of the comic scenes and in the character of Sir Fretful Plagiary, which is supposed to have been intended for Cumberland. If some of the characters in the 'School for Scandal' were contained in Murphy's comedy of 'Know your own Mind' (and certainly some of Dashwoud's detached speeches and satirical sketches are written with quite as firm and masterly a hand as any of those given to the members of the scandalous club, Mrs. Candour or Lady Sneerwell), yet they were buried in it for want of grouping and relief, like the colours of a well-drawn picture sunk in the canvas.

Sheridan brought them out, and exhibited them in all their glory. If that gem, the character of Joseph Surface, was Murphy's, the splendid and more valuable setting was Sheridan's. He took Murphy's Malvil from his lurking place in the closet, and "dragged the struggling monster into day" upon the stage. That is, he gave interest, life and action, or, in other words, its dramatic being, to the mere conception and written specimens of a character. This is the merit of Sheridan's comedies, that everything in them *tells ;* there is no labour in vain. His Comic Muse does not go about prying into obscure corners, or collecting idle curiosities, but shows her laughing face, and points to her rich treasure—the follies of mankind. She is garlanded and crowned with roses and vine-leaves. Her eyes sparkle with delight, and her heart runs over with good-natured malice. Her step is firm and light, and her ornaments consummate! The 'School for Scandal' is, if not the most original, perhaps the most finished and faultless comedy which we have. When it is acted, you hear people all around you exclaiming, "Surely it is impossible for anything to be cleverer." The scene in which Charles sells all the old family pictures but his uncle's, who is the purchaser in disguise, and that of the discovery of Lady Teazle when the screen falls, are among the happiest and most highly wrought that comedy, in its wide and brilliant range, can boast. Besides the wit and ingenuity of this play, there is a genial spirit of frankness and generosity about it, that relieves the heart as well as clears the lungs. It professes a faith in the natural goodness as well as habitual depravity of human nature. While it strips off the mask of hypocrisy, it inspires a confidence between man and man. As often as it is acted, it must serve to clear the air of that low, creeping, pestilent fog of cant and mysticism, which threatens to confound every native impulse or honest conviction, in the nauseous belief of a perpetual lie and the laudable

profession of systematic hypocrisy. The character of Lady Teazle is not well made out by the author; nor has it been well represented on the stage since the time of Miss Farren. The 'Rivals' is a play of even more action and incident, but of less wit and satire than the 'School for Scandal.' It is as good as a novel in the reading, and has the broadest and most palpable effect on the stage. If Joseph Surface and Charles have a smack of Tom Jones and Blifil in their moral constitution, Sir Anthony Absolute and Mrs. Malaprop remind us of honest Matthew Bramble and his sister Tabitha in their tempers and dialect. Acres is a distant descendant of Sir Andrew Aguecheek. It must be confessed of this author, as Falstaff says of some one, that "he had damnable iteration in him!" The 'Duenna' is a perfect work of art. It has the utmost sweetness and point. The plot, the characters, the dialogue, are all complete in themselves, and they are all his own; and the songs are the best that ever were written, except those in the 'Beggar's Opera.' They have a joyous spirit of intoxication in them, and a strain of the most melting tenderness. Compare the softness of that beginning,

"Had I heart for falsehood framed,"

with the spirited defiance to Fortune in the lines,

"Half thy malice youth could bear,
And the rest a bumper drown."

It would have been too much for the author of these elegant and classic productions not to have had some drawbacks on his felicity and fame. But even the applause of nations and the favour of princes cannot always be enjoyed with impunity. Sheridan was not only an excellent dramatic writer, but a first-rate parliamentary speaker. His characteristics as an orator were manly, unperverted good sense, and keen irony. Wit, which has been thought a two-edged weapon, was by him always

employed on the same side of the question—I think, on the right one. His set and more laboured speeches, as that on the Begum's affairs, were proportionally abortive and unimpressive: but no one was equal to him in replying, on the spur of the moment, to pompous absurdity, and unravelling the web of flimsy sophistry. He was the last accomplished debater of the House of Commons. His character will, however, soon be drawn by one who has all the ability, and every inclination to do him justice; who knows how to bestow praise and to deserve it; by one who is himself an ornament of private and of public life; a satirist, beloved by his friends; a wit and a patriot to boot; a poet, and an honest man.*

Macklin's 'Man of the World' has one powerfully written character, that of Sir Pertinax Macsycophant, but it required Cooke's acting to make it thoroughly effectual.

Mr. Holcroft, in his 'Road to Ruin,' set the example of that style of comedy, in which the *slang* phrases of jockey noblemen and the humours of the four-in-hand club are blended with the romantic sentiments of distressed damsels and philosophic waiting-maids, and in which he has been imitated by the most successful of our living writers, unless we make a separate class for the school of Cumberland, who was almost entirely devoted to the *comedie larmoyante*, and who, passing from the light, volatile spirit of his 'West-Indian' to the mawkish sensibility of the 'Wheel of Fortune,' linked the Muse of English comedy to the genius of German tragedy, where she has since remained, like Christabel fallen asleep in the Witch's arms, and where I shall leave her, as I have not the poet's privilege to break the spell.

There are two other writers whom I have omitted to mention, but not forgotten: they are our two immortal farce-writers, the authors of the 'Mayor of Garratt'† and

* Leigh Hunt.—Ed.

† First performed at Covent Garden in July, 1763. Mr. Hazlitt may have seen it at the same house in June, 1817.—Ed.

the 'Agreeable Surprise.'* If Foote has been called our English Aristophanes, O'Keeffe might well be called our English Molière. The scale of the modern writer was smaller, but the spirit is the same. In light, careless laughter, and pleasant exaggerations of the humorous, we have had no one equal to him. There is no labour or contrivance in his scenes, but the drollery of his subject seems to strike irresistibly upon his fancy, and run away with his discretion as it does with ours. His Cowslip and Lingo are Touchstone and Audrey revived. He is himself a Modern Antique. His fancy has all the quaintness and extravagance of the old writers, with the ease and lightness which the moderns arrogate to themselves. All his pieces are delightful, but the 'Agreeable Surprise' is the most so. There are in this some of the most felicitous blunders in situation and character that can be conceived; and in Lingo's superb replication, "A scholar! I was a master of scholars," he has hit the height of the ridiculous. Foote had more dry, sarcastic humour, and more knowledge of the world. His farces are bitter satires, more or less personal, as it happened. Mother Cole, in the 'Minor,' and Mr. Smirk the Auctioneer, in 'Taste,' with their coadjutors, are rich cut-and-come-again, "pleasant, though wrong." But the 'Mayor of Garratt' is his *magnum opus* in this line. Some comedies are long farces: this farce is a comedy in little. It is also one of the best acted farces that we have. The acting of Dowton and Russell, in Major Sturgeon and Jerry Sneak, cannot be too much praised: Foote himself would have been satisfied with it. The strut, the bluster, the hollow swaggering, and turkey-cock swell of the Major; and Jerry's meekness, meanness, folly, good-nature, and hen-pecked air, are assuredly done to the life. The latter

* First performed, I believe, at the Haymarket, Sept. 3, 1781. Mr. Hazlitt perhaps saw it acted at Covent Garden in June, 1818. —Ed.

character is even better than the former, which is saying a bold word. Dowton's art is only an imitation of art, of an affected or assumed character; but in Russell's Jerry you see the very soul of nature, in a fellow that is "pigeon-livered and lacks gall," laid open and anatomized. You can see that his heart is no bigger than a pin, and his head as soft as a pippin. His whole aspect is chilled and frightened, as if he had been dipped in a pond; and yet he looks as if he would like to be snug and comfortable, if he durst. He smiles as if he would be friends with you upon any terms; and the tears come in his eyes because you will not let him. The tones of his voice are prophetic as the cuckoo's under-song. His words are made of water-gruel. The scene in which he tries to make a confidant of the Major is great; and his song of 'Robinson Crusoe' as melancholy as the island itself. The reconciliation scene with his wife, and his exclamation over her, "to think that I should make my Molly *veep!*" are pathetic, if the last stage of human infirmity is so. This farce appears to me to be both moral and entertaining; yet it does not take. It is considered as an unjust satire on the city, and the country at large; and there is a very frequent repetition of the word "nonsense" in the house, during the performance. Mr. Dowton was even hissed, either from the upper boxes or gallery, in his speech recounting the marching of his corps "from Brentford to Ealing, and from Ealing to Acton;" and several persons in the pit, who thought the whole *low*, were for going out. This shows well for the progress of civilization. I suppose the manners described in the 'Mayor of Garratt' have, in the last forty years, become obsolete, and the characters ideal: we have no longer either hen-pecked or brutal husbands, or domineering wives; the Miss Molly Jollops no longer wed Jerry Sneaks, or admire the brave Major Sturgeons on the other side of Temple-bar; all our soldiers have become heroes,

and our magistrates respectable; and the farce of life is o'er.

One more name, and I have done. It is that of Peter Pindar. The historian of Sir Joseph Banks and the Emperor of Morocco, of the Pilgrims and the Peas, of the Royal Academy, and of Mr. Whitbread's brewing-vat, the bard in whom the nation and the king delighted, is old and blind, but still merry and wise:—remembering how he has made the world laugh in his time, and not repenting of the mirth he has given; with an involuntary smile lighted up at the mad pranks of his Muse, and the lucky hits of his pen—"faint picture of those flashes of his spirit that were wont to set the table in a roar;" like his own Expiring Taper, bright and fitful to the last; tagging a rhyme or conning his own epitaph; and waiting for the last summons, GRATEFUL and CONTENTED!*

I have thus gone through the history of that part of our literature which I had proposed to myself to treat of. I have only to add by way of explanation, that in some few parts I had anticipated myself in fugitive or periodical publications;† and I thought it better to repeat what I had already stated to the best of my ability, than alter it for the worse. These parts bear, however, a very small proportion to the whole; and I have used such diligence and care as I could, in adding to them whatever appeared necessary to complete the general view of the subject, or make it (as far as lay in my power) interesting to others.

* This ingenious and popular writer is since dead. [Wolcott died Jan. 14, 1819.—ED.]

† The 'Champion,' 'Examiner,' and 'Morning Chronicle.'

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